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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

JANUARY
1991

'In the Air'

(in Al Capone's communist America)

by Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne



Plus new stories by David Langford, Bob Shaw
and others

Ray Bradbury interviewed

ISSN 0264-3596



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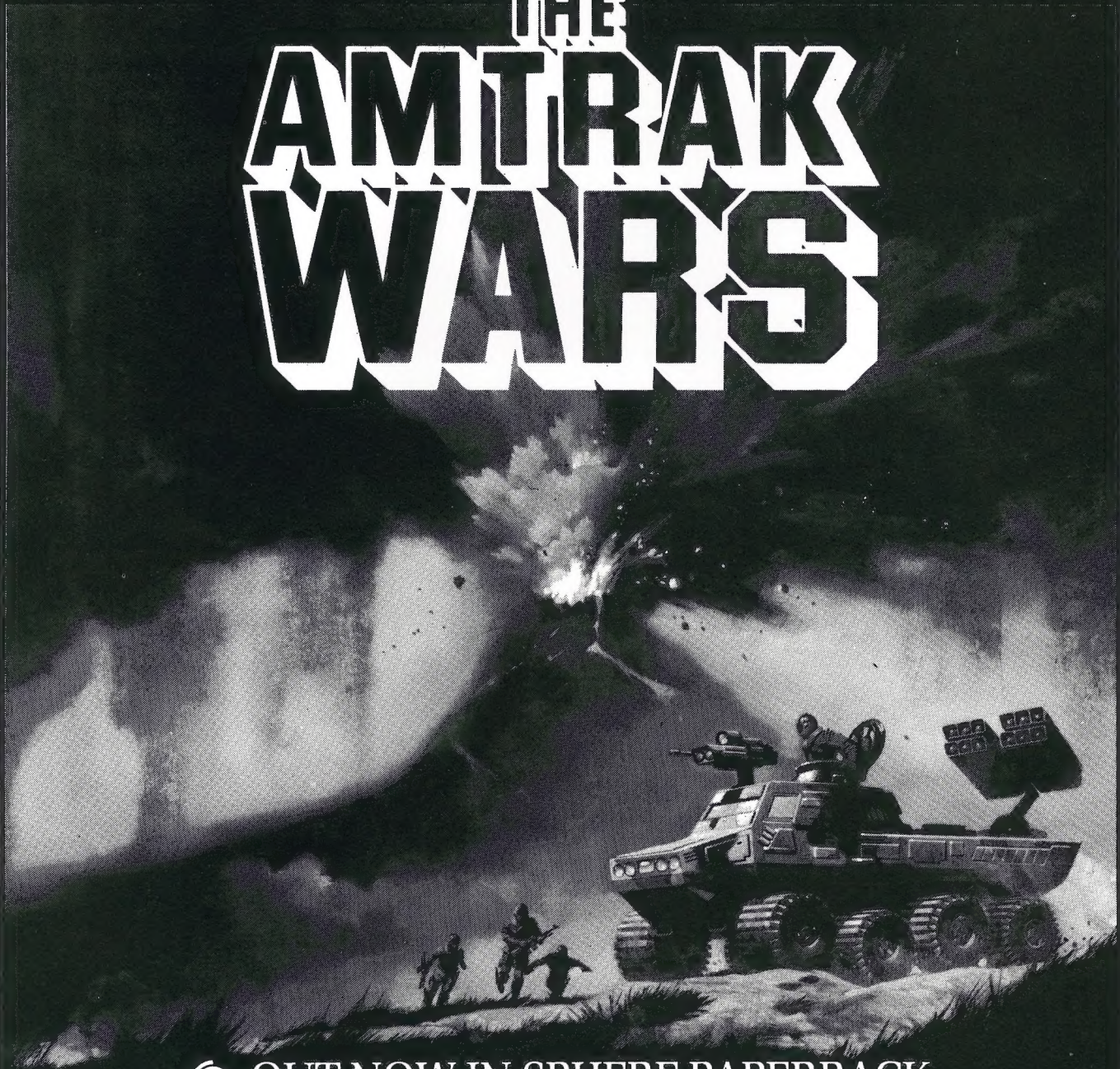
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Address: 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, United Kingdom. All subscriptions, back-issue orders, general correspondence, books for review, and enquiries about advertising should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions: £23 for one year (12 issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal orders should be crossed and made payable to *Interzone*. Overseas subscriptions are £28, payable by International Money Order. **Payments may also be made (in £ sterling only) by Access or Visa card (also MasterCard or Eurocard): please send your cardholder's name, initials and address written in block letters, with card number, card expiry date and signature.** Overseas subscribers, please add £6 if you wish airmail delivery. Alternatively, U.S. subscribers may pay by dollar check – \$42 (accelerated surface mail) or \$52 (air mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £230 (UK); £280 (overseas); \$420 (U.S. surface); \$520 (U.S. airmail).

Back-issues are available at £2.30 each in the UK (£2.50 each overseas), postage included. (US dollar price: \$4 surface mail or \$5 air mail.) All issues are still in print except numbers 1, 5, 7 and 17. Order them from address above.

Submissions: stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range, should be sent singly and each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Submissions should be sent to either of the following addresses: Lee Montgomerie, 53 Riviera Gardens, Leeds LS7 3DW
David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU

interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 43

January 1991

CONTENTS

Fiction

Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne: In the Air	6
David Langford: A Snapshot Album	35
Ben Jeapes: Memoirs of a Publisher	40
Bob Shaw: Incident on a Summer Morning	49
Neil Jones: Hands	57

Features

Interface: Editorial & News	4
Interaction: Readers' Letters	5
Ray Bradbury: Interview by Stan Nicholls	31
Nick Lowe, Wendy Bradley: Film & TV Reviews	46
Stan Nicholls: The SF Book Editors, 2	51
John Clute, Paul McAuley, etc: Book Reviews	65

Cover by Oscar Chichoni for David Pringle's
Ciencia Ficción: Las 100 Mejores Novelas, courtesy of
Ediciones Minotauro, Barcelona

Published monthly.

All material is © *Interzone*, 1990

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution through Diamond-Europress
Sales & Distribution, Unit 1,
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN
(tel. 081 896 4854)

U.S. and Canadian distribution through British
Magazine Distributors Ltd., 598 Durham Crescent,
Unit 14, Woodstock, Ontario N4S 5X3, Canada
(tel. 519 421 1285) – both trade and
individual queries welcomed.



Interface

David Pringle

We're approaching the end of the year (Merry Christmas!), and once more it's time for us to find out from our readers what they thought of the past 12 months' stories, articles and artwork in *Interzone*. Unfortunately, the pressures of the monthly schedule have prevented us from preparing and printing a detailed questionnaire of the type we sent to all our subscribers last year. Instead, we're simply posing the questions here in the editorial column.

We'd be most grateful if readers (particularly those who are renewing their subscriptions) could send us answers to the following questions. Just write or type your replies on any piece of paper and send them to us before the deadline of **1st February 1991**. We'll analyze the results in February, and report on them in this column next spring. Any further comments about the general direction of the magazine would also be most welcome.

Remember that the questions refer to all those issues of *Interzone* which carry a 1990 cover date – that is, issues 33 to 42 inclusive. Although it's published in December 1990, the present issue counts as number one of 1991, so you don't need to read it before replying. Cast your mind back over the preceding 10 issues and let us know your opinions (10, not 12, because we went from bimonthly to monthly in April 1990). If your knowledge of the magazine doesn't go back that far, don't worry: incomplete answers are also welcomed, and newer readers' opinions are always particularly interesting to us.

READERSHIP SURVEY

- 1) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive (i.e. those with a 1990 cover date) did you particularly like?
- 2) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?
- 3) Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive did you particularly like?
- 4) Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?
- 5) Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive did you particularly like?

6) Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 33-42 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

Remember: we're pleased to hear from readers at any time, but the deadline for replies which will count towards the results of our annual popularity poll is 1st February 1991. Thanks.

CASUALTIES...

Observant readers may have noticed that with effect from last issue **Lee Montgomerie** has moved from "Associate Editor" to Deputy Editor of *Interzone*. Meanwhile, **Simon Ounsley** has ceased to be Deputy Editor and is now called "Consultant Editor." The reason for this is a sad one: Simon has been seriously ill for well over a year with the debilitating disease of ME. Still in his 30s, he was obliged to take "early retirement" from his job as a Local Authority engineer. For many months he has been unable to read manuscripts or participate in the running of the magazine. We miss him, and fervently hope that he'll get well soon. Meanwhile, rather than resigning altogether from *Interzone*, he has agreed to remain on the masthead as a consultant: there will be a place for him when he gets better.

So please, guys, no more story submissions addressed to "Mr S. Ounsley." Send them to Lee Montgomerie instead; and, as Lee pointed out last issue, she's a Ms, not a Mr!

Also suffering from ill-health is **Charles Platt**, hence there's no column from him in this issue. Charles has contracted one of the modern writer's nightmare ailments, repetitive strain injury – which means that he can no longer tackle a keyboard. We trust he'll be better very soon, and we'll welcome him back on the happy day.

OTHER MAGAZINES

It's exasperating. We've kept puffing other folk's new sf magazines in these pages – and then they fail to appear. The two bright hopes of 1990 – *Psyko Candy* and *R.E.M.* – both seem to have died the death before producing a first issue (we hope we're wrong about the latter, but there's still no sign of it at this time of writing). One which has appeared, though, is the new fantasy title, **Amaranth** (see advert on page 22 of *IZ* 39). We hope the last-named does well. Meanwhile, **Graham Evans**

informs us that much of the material which was scheduled to appear in *Psyko Candy* will now be published in his small-press magazine **The Edge** – but we have yet to see proof of that, of course.

The moral would seem to be that we shouldn't say too much about proposed new British sf magazines, at least until they have produced some tangible goods. So henceforth we shan't. If would-be publishers want free publicity in these pages, they should send us their premier issue – not just a bundle of promises and good intentions. Otherwise our readers may be misled into parting with their money prematurely.

Having said that, one magazine which definitely will appear (indeed, it should be out around the same time as this issue of *Interzone*) is our own new bimonthly "sister"-title, **Million: The Magazine of Popular Fiction**. I mentioned this last time, and the advance subscriptions have begun to come in from *IZ* readers – thank you very much. Those of you who have been nervous about sending a £12 subscription for six issues in advance are welcome to send £2.30 (postage inclusive) for a sample copy of issue one. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to "Popular Fictions" and send them to the *IZ* address.

Million is not an sf magazine, but it does contain interesting material from many regular *IZ* contributors, including **Wendy Bradley**, **Eugene Byrne**, **Colin Greenland**, **Neil Jones**, **Dave Langford**, **Paul McAuley**, **Kim Newman**, **Stan Nicholls**, **Brian Stableford** and **Lisa Tuttle**. It will also be running interviews with sf, fantasy and horror-related authors such as James Herbert, Ursula Le Guin and Kurt Vonnegut. The aim is to produce a magazine which will deal "seriously" with all types and categories of popular fiction – not just contemporary bestsellers but famous authors of the past such as Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Unfortunately, the first issue of *Million* will not be on sale in **John Menzies'** chain of newsagents (wisely, from their point of view, they are waiting to see the first issue before committing themselves). I'm delighted to report, however, that they have at long last agreed to take *Interzone*. With effect from issue 42,

our print-run has grown by 5,000 – entirely thanks to Menzies. This means that *IZ* is now theoretically available from all UK newsagents. If they haven't got it on the shelf, they can order it via Menzies, W. H. Smith or Surridge-Dawson. So, if you happen to be asking, please don't take no for an answer!

Geoff Ryman is winner of the 1990 **John W. Campbell Memorial Award**, for his novel *The Child Garden* (part of which was serialized in *IZ* 21-22 as "Love Sickness"). We congratulate him. Runners-up for the Campbell were **K. W. Jeter** (*Farewell Horizontal*) and **John Kessel** (*Good News from Outer Space*). Simultaneously, **Michael Swanwick** was given the **Theodore Sturgeon Award** for his short story "The Edge of the World." Both awards were presented by veteran sf novelist **Frederik Pohl** at the University of Kansas's Center for the Study of SF.

New Worlds lives! No, this isn't another rash promise about a forthcoming magazine. **David Garnett** has succeeded in reviving his *Zenith* series of original sf anthologies (dropped by Macdonald/Orbit after two volumes) by repackaging it as *New Worlds*, with **Michael Moorcock's** blessing, and selling the idea to **Gollancz**. Apparently, Moorcock will take an advisory role, and the books should be appearing at roughly nine-monthly intervals over the next two or three years. Already the magic of the old title seems to be working: I recently overheard **William Gibson** tell Gollancz's sf editor **Richard Evans** that he would be pleased to write a story for the series, as he had always longed to be published in *New Worlds*.

In September 1990 I was invited to Barcelona, Spain, by publisher **Francisco Porrua** of Ediciones Minotauro. The occasion was the "long-awaited" publication in Spanish of my five-year-old book, *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*. I was impressed by the book's cover illustration, by Argentinian-born artist **Oscar Chichoni** – hence the picture on the front of this issue of *IZ*. Our thanks to **Paco Porrua** for permission to re-use it; and my personal thanks to him, and to sf bookstore owner **Alejo Cuervo** and others, for their amazing hospitality.

(David Pringle)

Interaction

Dear Editors:

Congratulations on the excellence of the last few issues of *Interzone*: the cyberpunk juvenilia is waning, and that has to be good news. The merits of Aldiss, Egan, MacLeod and others

are obvious, but keep on publishing new authors and searching for new models, because there is still a lot of room for essential development.

There are hints of a malaise in *IZ* 38. You complain that the "average intelligent sf novel" only sells 10,000 copies (approximately *IZ's* circulation), implying a dearth of intelligent readers. And **Brian Aldiss** joins in with: "the bulk of the science-fiction readership is philistine about literature."

So why do intelligent sf novels – and *Interzone* – sell to just 10,000 Philistines? Maybe it's because that's the way they're pitched. As **Aldiss** observes: "the establishment (i.e. editors?) are philistine about science." Sf publishers seem obsessed with complex or obscure science that maybe only 5,000 readers in the country understand: quantum logic, relativity, eidetics, nano-just-about-everything, and many more. Otherwise good stories have to be inflated with neutral baryons, gauss scoops, bosonic drives and other science macho nonsense. And if the protagonists aren't at least partially artificial, then it's bombsville for the story. As for the packaging: boring old cliché clumps of hardware like **Tim White's** donut on the *IZ* 39 cover have been doing their best to put off potential readers since the 50s.

The bulk of all "intelligent" fiction readers are female – so what has macho sf got to offer them? The overwhelming majority of "intelligent" readers are not nano-engineers or quantum physicists, so why try to impress them with incomprehensibility? Is it true that sf editors and their imagined readers are egghead nerds, *New Scientist* fans with an inordinate love of hardware and a hatred/contempt for unmodified humans?

No! *IZ* at its best can cover politics, humour, history, culture and psychology in an imaginative way. And there are a lot of potential readers who aren't Philistines, who do appreciate **Holman Hunt**, but who aren't into the intricacies of quantum logic yet. It isn't that sf writers are too intelligent or too progressive for a wider readership, it is that they are too obscure. My wife is your typical "intelligent" reader, who averages a novel a week: when you can persuade her, and others like her, to read *IZ*, then you'll be progressing out of the bunker. I think you're already moving in the right direction...

Crispin Keith
Isle of Wight

Editor: We hope you showed your wife our recent all-female issue (number 42). For that matter, quantum logic and nano-whatsits are remarkably missing from the present issue as well – not that we share your prejudice against such exciting subjects.

Dear Editors:

In the issue 40 letters column, **Craig Turner** really sees off those absurdly juvenile fantasy gamers, doesn't he? As he says – in agreeing with **Charles Platt**, of course – they really don't deserve more than cynical hackwork. Their genre is trapped in "endless cycles of stereotypes and clichés," and that's all they want – even if the editors and authors of some of the books aimed at them are so foolish as to produce something a little better.

There's just one small problem. For those of us who sometimes discuss sf and fantasy with people who aren't devotees, **Craig's** complaints sound exactly like the sort of thing we expect from the most bigoted and narrow-minded "outsiders." In fact, some of us are rather stupid. We can see that there are good as well as bad sf and fantasy stories, but we just can't find the sort of sharp, clean dividing lines within the genre that **Craig** sees. For example, **Craig** hated **Simon Ings's** "The Braining of Mother Lamprey" and demands "intelligent futuristic fiction," but I thought that "Braining..." was set in the future, and made clever, witty, and original play with pseudo-scientific ideas.

Sad, isn't it?

Phil Masters
Baldock, Herts.

Dear Editors:

I tried to keep an open mind, I really did, but to see that there are other people out there, such as **Craig Turner**, who agree with **Charles Platt** really disappoints me. Not that I have anything against **Mr Platt** in general – many of his articles have been an insight into sometimes unpopular viewpoints. His article on the *Warhammer* books, however, and **Mr Turner's** response, displayed an uncharacteristic lack of perception.

First, I will make it clear I am biased – I am a roleplayer, particularly of *Warhammer*, and personally thoroughly enjoy the "olde-worlde" Tolkien-esque tales. I am also a rational human being, one who enjoys satire, humour, cyberpunk and a healthy dose of cynicism. I do not run about all day shouting "Kill the goblin!!!" and practising black magic in my bedroom, as both gentlemen would seem to think. Role-playing is creative, intelligent and (he said for the *n*th time) fun. In a work of fiction I look for creativity, enthusiasm and entertainment, just like anybody else. Put quite simply, **Mr Platt's** view was that of an extreme toff, while **Mr Turner** seems to have the politics of (to quote **Alan Moore**) someone "slightly to the left of Genghis Khan."

Excuse the typing errors, but this letter was written in extreme anger... and besides, it isn't easy typing while some

Continued on page 75

In The Air

by Kim Newman
& Eugene Byrne



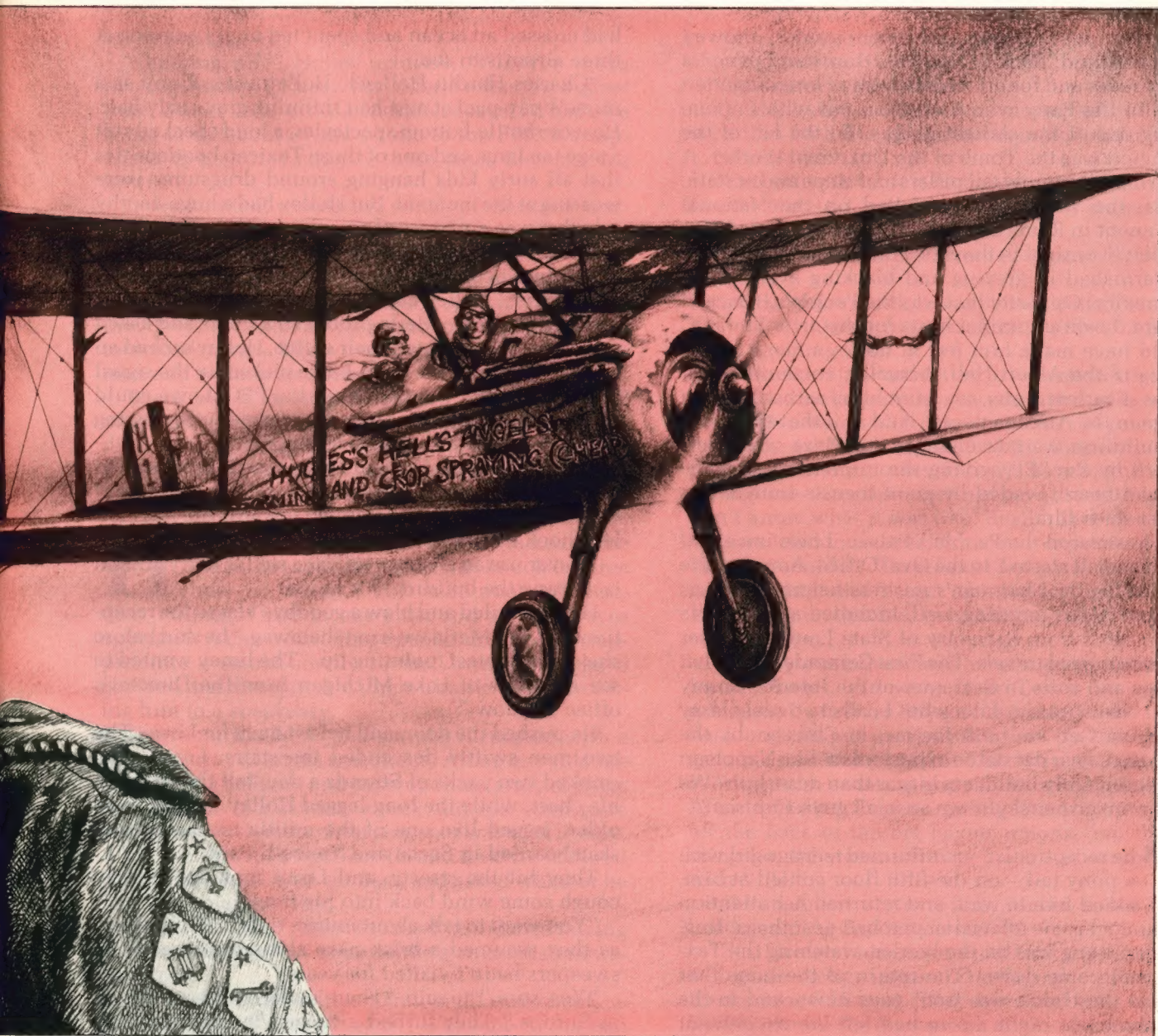
The PPC had offered to send an official car to the hotel, but he decided he'd rather walk. He would learn more from a stroll among the bustle of ordinary America than a cruise in a Detroit Streetmaster with a Party Suit like Comrade Merle.

Getting It Together might be in progress, but there were still long, impatient queues outside the grocery stores. Straight Talking might be the buzzword, but there were still only Party papers – *Newsweek*, *Workboy*, *MAD* – on the newsstands. It was chilly, and everyone was hurrying, thin overcoat collars turned up against the windblast. This was a busy city, with no time to lose. Very different from the London Lowe had left two days ago. There, it had been autumn; here, fall had fallen, and it was winter. He was breathing dirty ice-chips. He had been coughing off and on since the plane touched down at Debs Field. In the industrial USSA, you could always taste the air. There was already a light dandruff of snow, soon the glaciation level would sweep across Lake Michigan and the city would be like Reykjavik or St Petersburg, carpeted with filthy slush. All Americans were equal,

but those here with bearskin hats and gloves had a bitterly resented edge.

He came off Michigan Avenue, into Alphonse Capone Plaza. Soon, unless he misjudged First Secretary Vonnegut, to be renamed Something Else Plaza. He looked up at the triumphal statue, and wondered how long it would last. Apart from anything else, it was monumentally ugly. No larger than the *Hindenburg*, the bronze depicted a slimmer-than-the-newsreels Al on a rearing steed, riding down Robber Barons like Buffalo Bill pursuing Apaches. The bloated, top-hatted figures crawling away from the horse's hooves were grotesque caricature Vanderbilts, Rockefellers and Fords, weighed down by moneybags and jewelry. Over the last few years, the equestrian Al had taken a few dents but, ironically, the nearby stone statue of another former mayor, an obscurity named Daley, had been much more extensively vandalized. That must say something about the relative values of Chicagoans.

Chicago – not New York or Los Angeles or any other phony, workshy, seaboard city – had been the seat of



the Second American Revolution. And they never let you forget it. No matter what might be happening on Capitol Hill or the White House, this was the heart and guts of the USSA. The Windy City, he had been told endlessly, was where federal troops opened fire on Father O'Shaughnessy and his hunger marchers in the abortive uprising of 1905. Where Eugene Debs took control of the Union stockyard in 1912, as a prelude to launching the Revolution. In DeMille's famous 1926 film, the blood of the martyred strikers had mingled with that of the slaughtered cattle as the army stepped in, providing a single image that summed up the struggle to free the country from the Robber Barons. Actually, the fighting had been in the streets outside, not on the killing floor, but Americans always preferred a dramatic fiction to the dreary truth. Even now, official history accepted that Capone had got his scar in a knife-fight with William Randolph Hearst, though everyone knew he had really gashed his cheek on a garbage can lid falling over in a Brooklyn alley.

Even with the New Deal, slogans seemed to count more than policies. Researching a piece for *The Sun*

on the etymology of what they were already calling Vonnegutspeak, Lowe had discovered the First Secretary's team of advisors spent more time coming up with the catch phrases—Straight Talking, then Getting It Together—than in formulating the precise policies. He wondered if things could really change. Despite Vonnegut's efforts, the United Socialist States of America was as much under the shadow of Capone now as it had been under the Robber Barons in the '20s. After a yoke has been lifted, you have to get the ache out of your shoulders, rid yourself of the habit of being oppressed.

And if there were die-hard Caponists anywhere, this was the city for them. Back in '21, Chicago had been the power-base behind Mayor Al's bid for the highest office in the USSA. Now, with fifty-year-old crimes and massacres being raked over daily, Capone was constantly being labelled a monster, a mass murderer, a thief, a lecher, a pederast.

The Capone statue looked across the Plaza to the Lexington Hotel, where Chairman Al once made his headquarters. Now, it was a national treasure, and

every fifteen minutes uniformed guides showed people around. Back in the '70s, they had opened a sealed room and found the leftovers of long-forgotten lights of the Party who had fallen out with Capone during one of the earliest purges. To the left of the Lexington was the Tomb of the Unknown Worker. A white marble temple, all pillars and steps and ecstatic muses, the Tomb was modelled on the National Monument in Rome and looked like a giant wedding cake left overnight in the rain. Atmospheric pollution had tarnished it, greying and blacking every niche and crevice. Opposite that was the People's Palace of Culture, Lowe's nominal hosts for this trip. The PPC should have made him feel at home, since it was a replica of the Albert Hall. Actually, encountering it was as disorienting as, say, stumbling across London Bridge in the Arizona desert. And as if the statue and the buildings weren't enough, the Plaza was crisscrossed by the "El", giving the impression that the city had been invaded by giant locusts from a '50s Tsarist sci-fi film.

As he entered the People's Palace, Lowe imagined how it had all started. In the Oval Office, Amy Semple McPherson, the Chairman's mistress-helpmeet, brings Scarface Al his morning mail. Included are a couple of postcards from Secretary of State Louis B. Mayer on his European travels. The First Comrade likes what he sees and calls in Secretary of the Interior Jimmy Hoffa. "Hey Jimmy, dat's whut I calls two real classy buildings. Get 'em built for me, in Chicago, by the Lexington, near dat statue of me lookin' like Napoleon on Trigger. Only build 'em bigger than dese, huh? We don't want no one sayin' we'se small guys. Capisce?"

The receptionist – a uniformed teenage girl with a pony tail – on the fifth floor smiled at him, asked him to wait, and returned her attention to a monochrome television perched near the ceiling. Connie Chung was on the border, watching the Texican wall come down. The return of the Lone Star State to the Union was front page news, and in the restaurant last night, Lowe had felt the excitement when the band played "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon Us" in honour of the reunification. Connie was saying that freedom of passage across the border would actually mean fewer Americans trying to sneak into Mexico to take advantage of higher wages. Lowe wasn't sure. The Mexican-American War of 1917 had never really been resolved, and he had noticed how deeply anti-Mex feeling still ran throughout the USSA. The partition of Texas, when the Tsars and Kaisers and Kings of the Old World had tried to stifle the Revolution at birth by supplying Presidente Villa with arms and advisors, was still a national open wound.

The two people he was due to meet were only five minutes late. Merle Gardner – a thin, short man of about 40 – emerged from the interior office, clip-board and itinerary under his arm. He wore the unofficial Party uniform, a suit that shone at all the leading edges. He gripped Lowe's hand a little too hard, a little too long. A Junior Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Comrade Merle was definitely not an undercover FBI man. He sweated too much for that.

"Ah, Comrade Lowe," Gardner began, "this is, uh..."

Lowe didn't need to be told. This was the man he

had crossed an ocean and spent ten hours queuing at three airports to see.

"Charles Hardin Holley?" Holley was skinny as a nurse's pay-packet and had thinning grey curly hair. He wore bottle-bottom spectacles, a loud checked suit a size too large and one of those Texican bootlace ties that all surly kids hanging around drugstores were wearing at the moment. But Holley had a huge, toothy grin that was a mixture of openness and conspiratorial leer. He was a slightly disreputable uncle who drops in unannounced to cadge money and cause mischief.

"Charlie," Holley said, "call me Charlie."

When Comrade Merle produced a purse and asked them how they wanted their coffee, Holley arched an eyebrow towards the door. Lowe picked up the signal at once. Charlie wanted out of the PPC. Lowe could go along with that. He always preferred interviewing in the wild to visiting time at the zoo.

"Ah, wait here," Comrade Merle said, as he headed into the communal cafeteria to get two cartons of California coffee. Lowe stepped towards the lift. Holley shook his head.

"Never use an elevator unless a senior Party official is visiting the building, Mr Lowe."

Holley smiled and blew a goodbye kiss to the receptionist. "Tell Merle we went thataway," he said before she could protest, pointing up. "The limey wanted to see the view of Lake Michigan from the Director's office window."

He pushed the door, and held it open for Lowe. The two men swiftly descended the stairs. Lowe, who smoked two packs of Strands a day, felt the strain in his chest, while the long-legged Holley, fifteen years older, jogged like one of the militia teenagers who skateboarded in Sacco and Vanzetti Park.

They hit the streets, and Lowe took the time to cough some wind back into his lungs.

"You want to talk about music, right?," Holley said as they assumed a brisk pace along backstreets the sweepers hadn't visited for years.

"Yes, sure," he said. "There's a lot of interest in you in Europe." They turned a corner. In minutes, they were away from the official Chicago, and back at the turn of the century. Sidewalk stalls, ready to shut up at the first gleam of a cop's shield, were open, selling chocolate, fruit and other expensive items.

A pretty, middle-aged woman who ran a clothing stall was looking Lowe up and down, with undisguised desire.

"Don't get excited," said Holley, "she's after your trousers."

Last night, in the hotel corridor, a young man had offered Lowe a large dollar sum for his fairly ordinary Burton's jacket. The mark of forbidden luxury here was an authentic London pinstripe suit. The flashiest of the street traders, who was offering Japanese videos and Russian gramophones, signalled his black market wealth by proudly wearing a Dunn & Co. bowler hat, and a carnation in the lapel of his Burberry raincoat.

"Where are we going?"

"A place I know. If you're interested in music, you've got to hear it in an authentic setting. You won't discover nothing chewing the fat up there with tight-ass Merle offering 'advice' and 'cultural reference points' all the time."

"Won't Comrade Merle be upset when he finds out

we're bunking off?"

"Bunking off?" Holley grinned. "Oh, you mean playing hookey? Naaawww! Merle's having a great time. So we take a little Mexican leave? What's he going to do about it? Rat on me to the FBI? It's supposed to be a free country these days. Rave on, Mr Lowe."

Lowe nodded, wondering which of the street traders was the informer.

"Here's the place," Holley said.

It was Texas John's Bar and Grill, a greasy, nicotine-stained diner down a back alley. A sign announced that the establishment was proud to sell near beer and took foodstamps. There were generous reductions for men and women in uniform.

There was a fat man in a worn topcoat huddled over a stove heater behind the counter, and a solitary diner with his nose in *Workboy*, otherwise the place was empty. On the wall there was a movie poster; Stallone and Chuck Norris defending the Alamo.

Holley waved at the fat man, and walked to the end of the room. He rapped his knuckles three times on the wall. A framed photo of President Vonnegut slid to one side, and a pair of eyes appeared. A concealed door opened, and Holley stepped into a smoke-smelly room. Lowe should have guessed that disreputable Uncle Charlie would be taking him to a speakeasy.

The room was large and simple, furnished with a random array of tables and chairs. Along one side ran a bar with a catholic and cosmopolitan array of beers and liquors. In a corner, a rock and roll band were tuning up. Customers of varying ages waved at Holley. A tall youth with a bootlace tie and a velvet-collared jacket slapped him on the back and asked whether he would be playing later.

"Sure," he said, "just as soon as I've finished talking with my buddy. This is Lowe, he's an English newspaperman."

The youth stuck out his hand, and Lowe shook.

"Comrade," the youth said. "Welcome to the real America."

Holley steered him to a quiet corner. A waiter brought a bottle of Matthews Southern Comfort and Lowe reached for his wallet. Holley waved his currency away.

"Let me pay, buddy. I'm flavour of the month, the government likes me all of a sudden, the government pays people it likes. The way I see it, I got to make the most of it, because it might not last."

Lowe took a drink, and felt it cosy up to his ulcers. He had a Fleet Street Stomach.

"Is this the interview then?" Holley asked.

"I suppose so."

"So what's the question? All the Europeans have questions? I'm big in France, you know. If I could get my foreign earnings, I'd be rich."

The lead guitarist of the group played a few chords, out of tune, grinning over at the dissenter, and Holley laughed.

"Don't let Peggy Sue hear you do that to her song," he shouted. "That was my first real song, you know," he explained.

Lowe slipped some more liquor into his throat. "So, Charlie," he began, "why...?"

"Good question," Holley grinned. "A bit broad, but a good question."

"You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I suppose I do. You mean, why did I let myself in for a life of heartbreak and persecution?"

"If you like."

"You never think it'll be that bad, but then... well, like the man said, a socialist's gotta do what a socialist's gotta do..."

"You started when you were a teenager. Back in the '50s..."

Holley took a drink himself, and leaned back. His smile-lines turned into wrinkles, but he still looked like a gangling kid.

"Yeah, the '50s. Production drives, show trials, root beer and crinolines. I suppose when you get to my age, you tend to have a kind of misty picture of your young days, like with that fog around the frame you get in flashbacks in the movies. I always have to pull myself up and remember they were real hard times. Kids today don't know what it was like. Really, they don't..."

Lowe tried to remember his own experience of the '50s, but couldn't. There wasn't much to his memory before Telstar and Yeager's first spaceflight in the X-15. In Britain, that had been the fag-end of the Churchill Regime.

"It went sour before I was born, and my mama never let me forget. We were from Texas. We've been refugees all our lives. My grand-daddy stayed in Lubbock and got put up against a wall by Zapata. That gave me something against Chairman Al even before everyone else came out and said he was a sidewinder. After Debs died, Capone muscled his way into power off the back of the big labour unions, and the first thing he did was cut Texas loose and make a deal with Villa."

Like all Americans over forty, Holley spoke as if he had known Al Capone personally.

"Scarface and his cronies just took over the whole ball game. Long, Luciano, Hoffa and – of course – 'Executioner' Hoover. They were no better than the Robber Barons. Everyone was afraid of the rat-tat-tat through the door. The G-Men always came to take people away at four in the morning. Some got a bullet in the head after a big circus trial, some didn't even get a trial. The lucky ones disappeared to Alaska."

"Just after the War everything was rationed. Soldiers were coming back short a limb. We didn't have it so bad because we lived in the country, but we went hungry a lot. We had to give up so much of our food quota to the Party. And one day every month was a Day of Socialist Sacrifice when we didn't eat at all. But look at the newsreels, and see whether you think President Capone was losing any weight."

"What about music?"

"Music? I'll tell you what music was in those days: Mario fucking Lanza singing about agricultural machinery. And the movies weren't much better. All you'd get would be four-hour epics of the Revolution. They'd start by showing how bad things were under the Robber Barons, who were always played by Sydney Greenstreet or Peter Lorre or Oliver Hardy. Then the hero, usually played by Capone's pal George Raft, would make a half-hour speech and rouse the proletarian masses to a thrilling storming of somewhere-or-other choreographed by Busby Berkeley. Another

speech, some opera, and that would be it. All us kids knew there was a G-Man in every theatre watching to see who didn't applaud loudly enough."

"Was this in Texas?"

"No, we were relocated during one of Capone's Reconstruction Drives. Just about the entire population of Lubbock was bussed North in '42, to work in munitions plants near Roseville, Kansas. Al was paranoid about putting anything strategically important near Mexico, just in case they threw in with the Axis. Dad worked on tanks for a while, and after the War, the plant turned over to tractors. We lived in a kind of ghetto, the Texan quarter. Texans took a lot of abuse. Everyone remembered the War of '17, and we were forever the State That Couldn't Defend Itself. As a pimply Texan kid with glasses, my early life wasn't exactly comfortable. Most of the other Texan boys were six-foot-wide football players, and I was a beanpole. That meant I was elected to be the butt of all the Texas jokes. At school, there was this one Kansas kid - Melvin Yandell, the son of the local Party Chairman - and he was always beating up on me, with his buddies Chick Willis and Philly Winspear."

"And that made you a rebel?"

"Hell no, that made me desperately want to make the team. I thought if I was a credit to the Revolution, all the crap would stop. I was kind of what these days they call a nerd. I became an enthusiastic member of the Pioneers of Socialist Youth of America. They'd be like your boy scouts, I guess, only tuned in to the Party. I was a real good little Communist. At the age of twelve, I was the youngest Section Leader in Kansas, and I was winning badges for everything. I had badges for basic, intermediate and advanced socialism, efficiency, personal hygiene, fieldcraft and Karl H. Marx knows what else. My favourite was for Enemy Aircraft Identification. From silhouettes, I could tell a Sikorsky SI-51 jet fighter from a Supermarine Swift. If Churchill and the Tsar had ever decided to start World War Three, I was ready..."

Holley laughed.

"Let's put it this way, Mr Lowe, I was a creep. I ate all the bullshit they fed us, and asked for seconds. The best thing about the Pioneers, though, was that I got to fly. I did my time in gliders and trainers at summer camp, and a corporal at Fort Baxter sometimes took me up in a spotter plane. Flying, yeah, that was the best. If I'd had better eyesight and didn't have music, I'd have been a pilot."

It was hard to imagine the stringbean troubadour as an Ace of the Skies. He couldn't talk about flying without stretching his arms out like a little kid playing aeroplane.

So, Lowe wondered, how did a good little communist turn into a semi-outlaw, a marginal who has spent most of his adult life damning the Party in song, keeping only one step ahead of the FBI?

"What happened, Charlie?"

Holley came in to land, and refilled their glasses.

"It's kind of complicated. Dad gave me a beat-up old guitar for my sixteenth birthday and that changed things. Remember your first kiss?"

Lowe did. Nicola Godsell. Churchill Day, 1968.

"That's what my first guitar was like for me."

His hands were strumming now, fingers moving fast.

"By then, I was kind of growing out of the Pioneers

anyhow. There was a thing that started me to thinking real hard. Just before I was sixteen. It shook everything up. It's funny now I come to think about it, because that was about flying, too. I can even tell you exactly when it was. Labor Day in 1951. That would make it the weekend of the first Monday in September. You know how, when you were a kid, the Summers were longer. This one had gone on forever..."

"I'll settle your hash, you revisionist scum!" shouted Dick Tracy as he burst into the secret meeting of the Counter-Revolutionary Society for the Subjugation of the People. There was a gasp from Flabface, the last of the Robber Barons. Dick laughed his granite-jawed laugh as he surveyed the sorry crew.

Charlie tensed, willing the fearless FBI agent to pull his trusty Colt .45 and plug the bad guys.

"That's as far as you go, G-Man," said the smooth, sardonic voice of Bette Davis. "That prod you're feeling in your back is a pistol, and I'm not scared to use it. Finger some clouds..."

"Dick Tracy, Special Agent of the FBI is in a tight spot," said the announcer urgently as the staccato theme music rose. "Will Dick escape? And can he stop Flabface destroying New York with his death-ray? To find out, tune in to next week's thrilling episode of *Dick Tracy, Secret Agent of the FBI*."

"How do you like that, Dad?" said Charlie. "It just goes to show you can never trust a dame."

"That's a fine thing to say," replied his father, as he plugged his corn cob with Victory Virginia. He switched off the radio and pulled his chair across the wooden floorboards to be nearer Charlie. He lowered his voice, so that Ma wouldn't hear him from the kitchen.

"Listen, son, it's the big holiday weekend coming up, and you're getting about old enough to start finding out about, uh, dames for yourself. I got an idea..." He paused to put a match to the cheap tobacco, engulfing them in thick, stale-smelling smoke. "Your Dad may be dumb, but he ain't stupid, if that makes sense. I seen how young Peggy Sue next door's been looking at you these last few months."

Charlie shrank into his chair, partly to escape the bitter fumes, partly because he had an idea what was coming next.

He was scared. Not that a Pioneer would admit that to anyone.

"She's a nice girl, Charlie. From a good Texan family, too. She's just about your age. Why don't you go next door and ask her if she'll go to the movies with you? They've got *The Octopus* playing down at the People's Palace. Sounds like a real good picture, and I bet that your Captain in the Pioneers has recommended you all go see it."

That was true. Captain Rook said it was the duty of every Pioneer to catch *The Octopus*.

"It's got Sydney Greenstreet as the Railroad King," his father was saying. "And Julius Garfinkle plays the union leader. Of course, if everything goes right you won't be looking at the screen much. Might even have to go back to see the movie."

The kitchen door was shouldered open, and Mother came in, carrying Charlie's badge-festooned uniform jacket.

"What plots are you two hatching behind my back?" she asked.

Father grunted and retreated behind the *Roseville Echo* to read how his fellow worker-heroes had exceeded their annual targets.

"There you are, Charlie," said his mother. "I've sewed on your latest badge and ironed the jacket. Historical Perspective, whatever next. Don't you get this messed up before the parade tomorrow. What are you doing this evening?"

"I've got to go out," said Charlie. "The section is still a little rough on some of the drill. We've had a lot of young kids join in the last few weeks. I've got to practise them some more for the parade."

"Don't be back too late. You'll need a good night's sleep."

His father put down the *Echo* and smiled. "Ella's right, Charlie. It'll be a big day tomorrow, with all those fliers coming to town tomorrow. You know why they're coming? Because we exceeded all our production targets."

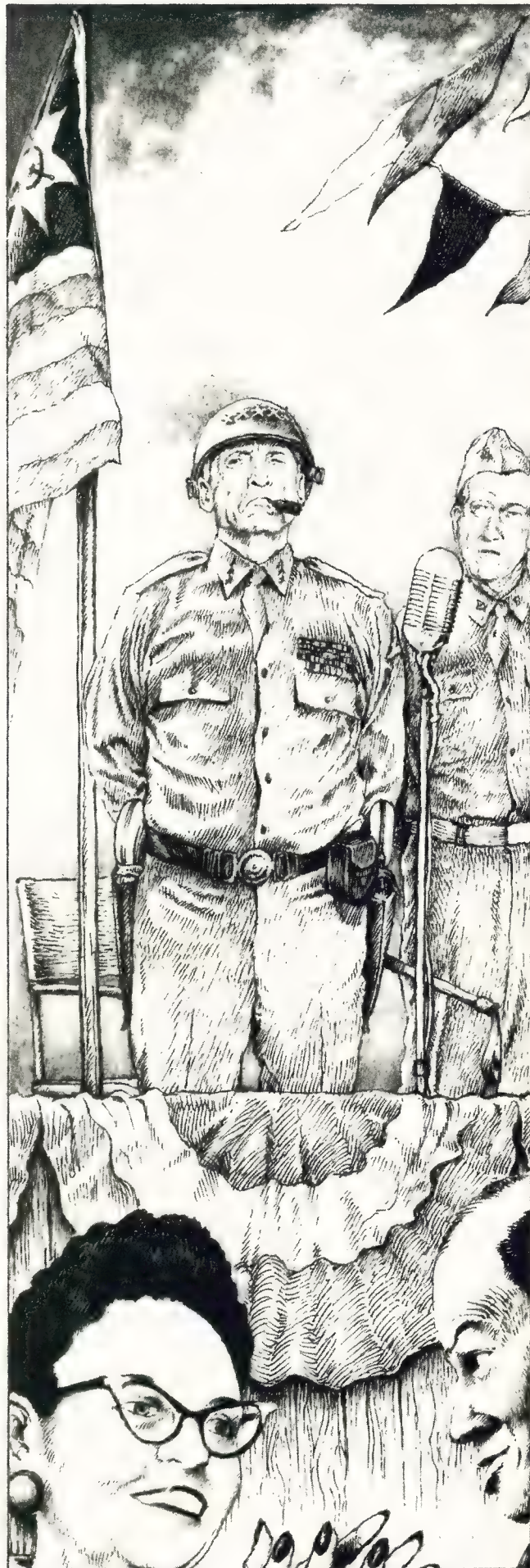
Charlie's father turned the radio on again. It was not a good idea to miss President Capone's Friday-evening fireside chat.

The familiar, rough-edged voice, began. "Citizens, Workers, this is Chairman Al..."

"Fireside chat!" said mother. "It'd be a fine thing to have a proper fireside instead of a rickety old stove. And as for you, Charlie, I think you're getting a little old to be still playing with the Pioneers. It's about time you started seeing girls. Why don't you ask Peggy Sue out to a movie... And just what are you grinning at, Lawrence Holley?"

"I don't know how much you know about America, Mr Lowe, but a Labor Day weekend is some big deal. Every town has its parades, and speeches and hoe-downs. It was an even bigger deal under Chairman Capone. Everyone I knew bought it outright. Except Mom, of course. She was a real old dissenter. She was taking the risks. She was First Aid officer at the tractor plant, and was too good at it to be got rid of. Safety was kind of lax, and I had this idea that all kinds of gory accidents were happening that I wasn't being told about. They called my Mom a lifesaver, and cut her some slack. Dad respected Scarface Al, though. He was never a Party member, because Roseville couldn't have any Texan yellowstreaks on their team, but he eventually got to be a foreman at the plant. He kept his nose clean and half-believed all that bullstuff about the nobility of labour. And things like these famous fliers coming to town was proof to him that the Party cared about ordinary folks like us.

"After Al died, we had farts like Goldwater and Burns in the White House. Nobody took them seriously because they were senile. They were only alive because they were plugged into the direct current. That's when my mother really went to town. Back in '83, she was in a line at the Roseville General Store and cracked a joke about the shortages. Said what she wanted for her birthday was a pound of beefsteak wrapped in toilet paper. Someone squealed to the Sheriff and she ended up on charges of recidivism and aggravated hooliganism. She was eighty. All the neighbours clubbed together to pay her fine, then held



a big party for her, and gave her a present of a pound of beefsteak wrapped in toilet paper.

"Now where the hell had we got to? Labor Day weekend, 1951. All righty.

"I couldn't sleep. When you're that age it's very important to appear real cool about everything. But I was bursting with excitement and pride. I was so wound up I could hardly pee. The Revolutionary Fraternity Squadron was coming to Roseville. I told you I wanted to be a pilot? Now, all my great heroes — every single one of them — were going to appear in my home town the following day. I'd been reading about this in the *Echo* and *Socialist Youth Magazine* for weeks and it still didn't sound true.

"The RFS was an elite cadre. Only the most famous names in American aviation need apply. If the Wright Brothers had been around, they might just have qualified to pull the chocks away. First, there was Lieutenant Lafayette R. Hubbard. He'd been a barnstormer before the War, flew for the Navy during it, had sunk more submarines than rust, and had personally killed Tojo in single combat with his bare hands. *Thrilling Air Battles* had a great cover of him strangling the Jap while leaping out of a burning Workers' Victory Twin-Engine Fighter. That's what the record said anyway, and the record ought to know, because Hubbard wrote most of it himself. I'd read his stuff in *Socialist Sky Aces*, *Blackhawk*, and a dozen other officially approved pulps. And Hubbard, Mr Lowe, was just the ground crew.

"Then there was Major Joseph 'Bomber Joe' McCarthy. He had led the first carrier-borne attack on Japan with a squadron of B-25s. My favourite was Colonel Charles Lindbergh. He was famous as the first man to fly the Atlantic solo, but he had been a fighter pilot during the war, with 60 kills to his credit. I guess I liked him because he was something of a loner, like I was. The Lone Eagle, they called him. Who else? Oh yeah, General Mitch 'Duke' Morrison. He was the first American ashore at both Normandy and Iwo Jima and had also flown Warhawks with the Flying Tigers in China. A big Iowa farmboy with a grin that could crack pebbles, he was reputedly the toughest man in America, after J. Edgar Hoover.

"The leader was General George S. Patton. During the War, he had been a maverick, specializing in invasions. Really, flying was just a hobby for him, but he had made himself an ace in his spare time, and flown all sorts of important bombing missions, all the while planning and leading the allied ground forces in Africa and France. Most famously, he got to Berlin ahead of his own troops by dropping those incendiaries on the SS Death Division that was dug in waiting to kamikaze the whole city. For that against-orders jaunt, Chairman Al presented the General with a pair of pearl-handled, silver-plated Wild West revolvers that he was rumoured to wear on all occasions. As a Brit, you might remember Old Guts and Glory because, after Yalta, he was the one who wanted to go straight from blasting Berlin, which he had handled personally, to flattening London and keeping the world safe for communism by getting in early on World War Three."

The sun was already high as Charlie met the rest of his section at 08:00 hours on Main Street. On a nearby piece of waste ground, he ran them through some last-minute drill with their wooden rifles, and straightened out a few caps and scarves. He formed them up into line and marched them off towards the edge of town. He was satisfied, and confident.

They RV'd with Captain Rook and the three other sections out by the plant. None of the other sections were as well turned out as Charlie's boys. Pete Horowitz's section looked real sloppy: shorts not properly pressed, shoes and boots barely polished, unvarnished rifles held together with Utility Tape. Horowitz's Heroes couldn't dress a straight line if there was a year's ration of candy bars in it. For all that, it never seemed to bother Rook. Pete Horowitz, Kansas-born and good-looking, was the Captain's golden boy.

Rook ordered them to parade files, pushed his wire-rims back, and called out the register. All 108 boys in the Roseville Company of the Pioneers of Socialist Youth, First Brigade, the Frank Nitti (2nd Kansas) Guards Division, were present and correct. Rook, a bachelor who taught Gym and Political Education at Roseville High, pulled himself up to his full five-eight, heaved in his stomach so hard Charlie thought his shorts would fall down, and gave them the obligatory pep-talk. It was familiar stuff about representing their community, showing due respect towards the heroes, and striving in all ways to follow the example of the selfless socialist patriots. For good measure, he added his usual little warning on the dire dangers of sexual incontinence.

The Captain called come to attention, shoulder arms, right turn and march. Charlie expected that his section, since it was best turned-out, would take the point. But Rook ordered Pete Horowitz to lead off. Ah well, fuck you very much Comrade Captain Porky Rook. He led his section off second, pacing his long legs carefully so the younger kids could keep in step.

By now, everyone in town was also on the way to Baxter Field, the airstrip at the edge of Fort Baxter. Most people were on foot, some of the folk from the collective farms were coming in on donkey-carts or farm-wagons pulled by tractors. A group of Party officials from Tuttle Creek drove by slowly in a gleaming limousine.

Once, the section was forced to scatter into the dirt at the side of the road when an old Haynes Roadster, driven at speed, brushed by, the horn honking the first line of the "Internationale" at them. Charlie heard someone yell "Texas toy soldier" at him, and he recognized the driver as Melvin Yandell. He dressed and talked like a hoodlum, but his Daddy was Osgood Yandell, the local Party Chairman. Yandell's sidekicks Chick Willis and Philly Winspear leaned out of the car as they passed to make the usual cracks about "Texas faggots in short pants." Charlie saw Yandell taking a crafty pull on a bottle as he drove past.

Recently, the Yandell crowd hadn't been beating him up so often, but they had taken to cruising slowly through the Texan quarter on Summer evenings, calling out to the girls. According to the Thoughts of Chairman Junior Melvin, all Texan women were sex-starved because their men weren't capable, and he

and his buddies were more than willing to step into the breach and do their duty for Kansas. Peggy Sue told Charlie that her older sister Patsy was staying in most nights, just to keep out of Melvin's way. One day, Yandell would cause some serious trouble...

But Charlie was determined that nothing was going to spoil his day. As he marched his guys through the bunting-festooned gates of Fort Baxter – “Home of the 194th Socialist Infantry Regiment, Comrade Col J.T. Hall Commanding” – he snapped a perfect salute. The guards smartly returned the gesture. He ordered his guys, his men, to eyes right as an additional though not strictly necessary courtesy. The Sergeant at the gate, a Tennessee Comrade with Texan sympathies, whistled admiration. Marching at the head of his section, perfectly in time with his comrades, Charlie felt like a hero himself.

The Pioneers formed up in front of a wooden grandstand erected for Party bosses, factory and collective farm representatives, and their families and hangers-on. To their right was the red carpet to the stand and to Colonel Hall. Beyond the carpet was the regimental band, then the 194th itself. Already, it was getting hot, and Charlie's neck felt sweaty and gritty under his bandanna.

Charlie's folks weren't important enough to get into the grandstand. They were over in the bleachers at the far side of the runway, sitting with Peggy Sue and her parents. He didn't like that much. For all he knew, they could be discussing wedding arrangements...

“I hear them! They're coming!” someone shouted. Gradually, the field fell silent.

An aero-engine droned in the distance. Captain Rook yelled the Pioneers to attention and 108 pairs of feet slammed into the ground practically in unison. Even Pete Horowitz got in step for the occasion. Over on their right, the 194th did likewise. The regular army drilled a lot less smartly than the Pioneers.

The engine noise got louder. For Charlie, this was torture. He had to keep eyes front, but he wanted to watch the magnificent craft execute what would doubtless be a perfect landing.

The regimental band struck up Sousa's “Heroic Struggle of the Seventh Socialist Air Fleet.”

Something was out of step. The plane sounded as if it needed a serious overhaul. And it was a small engine, a coughing insect almost lost under the music. Not nearly powerful enough for one of the big Curtiss Helldivers the RFS flew.

Tyres screeched like an abused seagull as they hit the tarmac, left it again, and definitively touched down. Spectators were gasping, chattering in surprise. Some were laughing.

It was time to disobey orders. He let his eyes wander right.

The aircraft bumping past was not a sleek Helldiver, but a biplane plainly held together by spit, gum and string. The landing was a disgrace. Pieces dropped off the smoke-belching machine as it limped down the runway, coming in like the song, On a Wing and an Oath of Loyalty to the Revolution. The engine burped its last, and a two-bladed wooden prop fluttered to a halt. If this was the RFS, everyone had been seriously misled. There were words painted down the side of the fuselage. HUGHES'S HELL'S ANGELS – BARN STORMING AND CROP SPRAYING (CHEAP).

Charlie's Enemy Aircraft Recognition badge did not cover this flying freak.

Everyone else seemed just as confused, but it didn't pay to take risks; if these were the revolutionary heroes, it would cost someone a one-way trip to Alaska if they were insulted. So the military band struck up the latest national anthem, as two men climbed from the battered aircraft. Both wore torn leather flying jackets and oil-stained pants. The younger man reached into the forward cockpit and pulled out a guitar case. The older man, probably in his fifties, opened his jacket and, to the barely-suppressed shock of the spectators, struggled to pull a bottle from an inside pocket. Having succeeded, he uncorked it with his teeth, and took a lengthy, luxurious swig. Apart from Melvin Yandell, Charlie had never seen anyone drink alcohol – he knew the bottle had to be liquor – in public, although almost everyone violated the Prohibition Edict in private.

As the old pilot passed the bottle to the younger man, a girl in her late teens went forward along the red carpet to welcome the RFS on behalf of Roseville, and, in honour of General Patton's achievements over Berlin, present them with a bouquet of flowers in the shape of a bomb.

As the girl wobbled, on unfamiliar high heels, Melvin Yandell shouted out something crude about “Texas tootsies,” and she blushed flag-red. It was Patsy, Peggy Sue's sister, and, Texan or not, the prettiest girl in town, which was why she was the Welcome Comrade. Patsy, who usually wore shorts or cheerleader skirts, was in a starched pink dress that stuck out three feet in any direction. Charlie wondered if, in three years time, Peggy Sue would be shaped like Patsy, and found himself a little hotter and grittier under the bandanna. He tried to think of Chairman Capone on the toilet, and hoped his mental incontinence wouldn't noticeably swell the front of his perfectly-pressed shorts. Actually, he realized later, he could have sprouted a boner the size of one of General Patton's B-29s and no one would have noticed.

As Patsy approached, a yellow-tooth grin split the older pilot's mask of flying grime. He unwound what had once been a white silk flying scarf to drape it over his plane's wing. He pulled off his flying helmet and goggles, and shook out a wild man's head of long, unkempt grey hair.

Patsy was so concerned with not falling off her heels and humiliating herself she didn't notice that the fliers hardly fit the description of the expected heroes. Charlie realized Patsy was not wearing her glasses this morning, and probably couldn't see the end of the carpet, let alone the air hobo she was giving a floral incendiary.

The drunk accepted the bouquet, laughed a little, tossed it over his shoulder and grabbed Patsy. He began dog-licking her face and sorting through her onion-layers of skirt in search of her backside. This was definitely not the way a socialist hero behaved. It was a prime example of sexual incontinence. Melvin was cheering, but his father shut him up.

Over to the right, a voice called for MPs. It was Colonel Hall, now scowling along the red carpet towards the plane. He reached the fliers as, at the prompting of his friend, the older man reluctantly released Patsy. She slipped off her shoes and ran back

towards the grandstand, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand. She had probably had to get up at 04:00 hours to start painting her face, and was now badly smudged.

The Colonel was too far away for Charlie to hear everything being said. But he could catch the gist of it. Colonel Hall asked the fliers to identify themselves. Whatever their answer was, it had nothing to do with the RFS. Two MPs arrived and were told to take the pilots away. The younger began pleading apologetically with the Colonel. They had run out of gas and had needed somewhere to land. The Colonel, who just wanted this nuisance out of the way, relented, giving some kind of stern warning. All the soldiers said Colonel Hall was a pushover. The old guy cheered when he was let off, slapped the Colonel on the back so hard the officer's belly shook, and offered some of his liquor to the MPs.

The newcomers, Charlie gathered, were called Jack and Howie.

"In America, we set a great store on mobility, Mr Lowe. That's one of the things Capone hated, but was never able to crush. Scarface wanted us to stay put on the farm or in the collective, but I guess we're just born with the urge to roam. It's such a goddamn big country. You travel enough, rack up enough good stories, and you become some kind of hero. Most of those wanderers were on the move all the time because they were fugitives from the state. Guess that's what happened to me. I wasn't the first to hit the road with a guitar, though. In the '30s, there was a guy named Guthrie, a wheel in his local collective who one day just plain had enough of Capone flushing the Revolution down the commode and set out to tell the country what he thought of the whole damn ball of wax. They caught him, and hanged him. That brings you up, doesn't it? They hanged a man for singing songs. Somehow, that's the worst thing Capone ever did. I know he had all those Navahos and blacks wiped out and used to shoot down his former friends like jackrabbits, but poor old Woody, hanging from a climbing frame in a schoolyard in Illinois, is like the totem to me, the one victim who stands for all the others. Wrote a song about him, once.

"I wrote songs about Jack and Howie too, but you've never heard them. They were early things, and no good. And that's a shame, because those two bums in their beat-up ridiculous flying deathtrap turned my whole life around.

"Jack was French-Canadian, although I think he was born in the USSA. He was handsome in a comic strip way, like Smilin' Jack without the moustache. He started a lot more poems and stories than he finished, got drunk eight nights a week and threw in mornings too, and went after women as if he were trying to beat Errol Flynn's record. He wrote books that came out in Canada and France, and used to get smuggled in, distributed by dissenter groups. There might be official American editions of some of his novels, *In the Air*, *The Subterraneans* or *Lonesome Traveller*, real soon. Word is, he drank himself to death twenty years back, but I don't have to believe that if I don't want to. When I knew him, years of moonshine had given his voice an extra frog-croak, and he was in poetry the way some of the best guys

are in music, because he didn't have a choice. The words were inside, and they just kept bursting out. I wish I could remember more of what he said, because I'd put tunes to it. He used to chew patent medicines like they were life savers, and tried to sleep as little as possible so he could get the most awake time out of his life.

"Howie is the real mystery. Some people say he was born rich and lost it all in the Revolution. This story also claims he gave Al his scar, smashing an ornamental pen-set into the Chairman's face during the storming of the Stock Exchange. Since that'd require Capone to be in the thick of some fighting I tend to discount it as a fanciful rumour. Other people say Howie was some kinda crazy wildcat oilman raised by Apaches, or coyotes. There's even a story that he made a living designing brassieres but that's just too ridiculous, although a job that required a lot of thinking about titties would have suited him fine. Another version is that he used to be a Hollywood movie director in the '30s, and fell foul of the Arbuckle Code while he was making a big aviation epic about aces flying south of the border to rescue POWs the Mexicans were holding after the war. Howie was in trouble because he kept leaving out the screenwriter's twelve-page political speeches so he could spend more time shooting airplanes, but he was actually fired for getting a Party Censor's daughter knocked up and using live ammunition to make a battle scene more realistic. That was considered wasteful and unsocialist. The Party brought in another director, but when they were doing one of these big aerial dogfights – with all the cameras rolling and like three million dollars' worth of budget in the air at one time, what with stunt men and old planes and special effects explosions and crashing dirigibles – Howie flies through in a biplane trailing a flag saying 'this movie sucks cock,' heads off towards the sunset and is never seen again. Now I don't know if that's true or not, but it's the version you'd want to believe. Right?"

The low hum of powerful aero-engines came out of the East. This was the sound Charlie had been expecting, the fantasy-fuelled thrum of the machines that had made the USSA masters of the skies over Japan. Neither London nor St Petersburg could match the glory of these masterpieces of precision combat engineering.

Captain Rook again ordered the Pioneers to attention, and a pair of Curtiss Helldivers roared out of the sun and overflew the field at 200 feet. The blue-painted aluminium dreams commanded the sky, gleaming in the morning. A banner began to trail from the second plane. THE RFS SALUTES THE GLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE OF ROSEVILLE. The Kansans in the stands and the Texans in the bleachers rose as one to cheer, as if the Great Socialist Hero diMaggio had just belted another one out of the field.

The single-engined naval dive bombers circled and passed again, this time a little higher, each executing three perfect victory rolls revealing the red hammer and sickle within white star insignia painted on the port upper and starboard lower wings. The RFS were grandstanding, but it paid to play up to the crowd a little.

Charlie clamped the inside of his cheek with his back teeth, biting until he drew blood in an effort to keep tears from his eyes. On a day like this, he pitied anyone who wasn't a communist, who wasn't an American. For the millionth time he swore to be a pilot. He wouldn't let his eyes fail him; he would sneak a look at the doctor's wallchart and memorize it. To joust in the clouds with the beasts of capitalism and imperialism! That was the best the USSA could offer.

The Helldivers circled the field once more before touching down perfectly. They taxied up to the red carpet close to the biplane. The two deadbeats were watching the proceedings, sharing private jokes as they passed the bottle between them. Colonel Hall should have had these two and their revolting old stringbag taken well out of the way.

The fliers of the RFS clambered out of their long glass-canopied cockpits, and pulled off jackets and helmets to reveal full dress uniform. Applause greeted each hero as he showed his face. Charlie recognized them all from magazines and newsreels. Hubbard, with his shock of red hair, Duke Morrison, face like the sandy rock of Mount Rushmore, Patton, jaunty cigar clamped in his teeth and a five-starred brass hat on his bullet-shaped head, and McCarthy, the chubby clown of the outfit. They stepped forward to take their bows. Then Lindbergh climbed out of his plane, dressed in a heated jumpsuit and shining helmet like a character from *Flash Gordon Liberates the Universe*. He took off his helmet, and showed himself, middle-aged but boyish.

When the bandmaster was satisfied all five were ready, he struck up the national anthem. The pilots slammed mechanically to attention, raising clenched fists in the salute of solidarity.

"Oh say can you see," a lone, clear voice sang, "by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming..."

More spectators joined the singer. Charlie felt the tug of the music, and opened his throat to join in...

"...whose red stripes and bright star..."

Charlie's voice was good, but they didn't like him to sing with the School Choral Society because, as his teacher said, "you can't leave a tune well enough alone..."

"...the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air..."

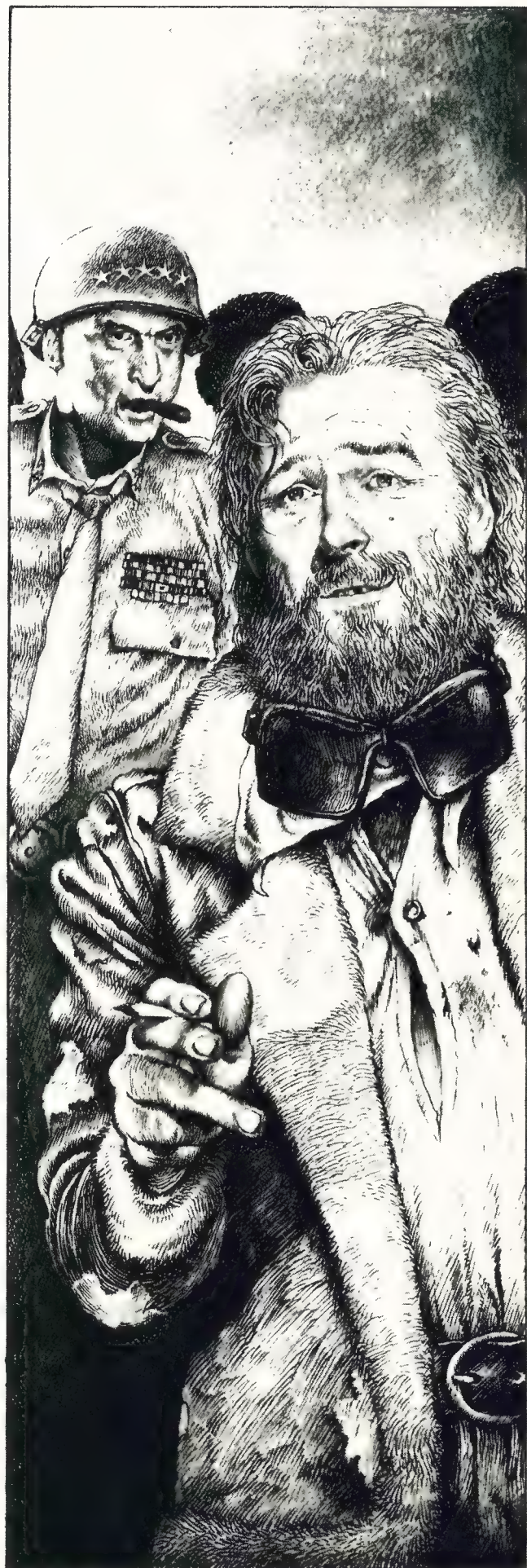
There was something about music – any kind of music – that made him feel strange inside.

"Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave..."

The five heroes were deeply moved. Lindbergh and Morrison both had manly tears in their eyes. McCarthy was holding his hands over his mouth and nose as the emotion overcame him, shoulders shaking...

"...o'er the land of the true, and the home of the brave."

At the anthem's end, Howie loped over and presented Patton with the floral bomb. The General looked uncertainly at the old man, but accepted the bouquet, holding it up for everyone to see. Someone screamed, and the MPs drew their pistols. A tendril of smoke was curling up, as if the infernal device were about to go off, scattering shrapnel petals in the crowd. There was a crackle, and flames popped out of tribute. Patton dropped the gift in shocked dismay,



spitting out his cigar, and drawing one of his pearl-handled revolvers. On the carpet the flowers flared suddenly, as if doused in gasoline.

Howie made exaggeratedly sorry noises and stepped in to stamp on the burning flowers. Someone in the section tittered, and Charlie hissed shut up and stand to attention. His cheeks burned at the disgrace, and he hoped Rook hadn't noted the lapse of discipline. Moments later, Colonel Hall and two jeeploads of MPs, white bands around their helmets, were on the scene. Two soldiers grabbed the old man. A cigarette lighter fell from his grip.

Now, Charlie could hear exactly what was going on. Patton said in a chill-making rasp that he'd never been so insulted, "not even Rommel tried to off me with a bunch of flowers dipped in aviation fuel. Not even that bastard Monty. It's an insult to the Navy, the Air Force, First Secretary Capone, the Communist Party and the American People." Colonel Hall apologized as though his career depended on it, which, come to think of it, it did. Jack, the younger pilot, pleaded on his friend's behalf, saying that the guy was a decorated war veteran, that whenever he saw a Helldiver it reminded him of the comrades he had lost in the Pacific and he broke down. "Veritably, he's as good a communist as the next guy. He needs treatment not punishment." Jack spoke fast, with a singsong French flavour, and was persuasive, even if he was feeding everyone a bullshit salad with chives. Patton was unimpressed and single-minded, demanding with icy authority that Hall have the recidivist shot right this instant.

Colonel Hall dithered. He wasn't sure if shooting strange civilians fell within his jurisdiction. "God-damnit to Hell," Patton swore, cocking his pistol, "I'll scrag the vermin myself."

"Uh, General, surely you wouldn't do that," said the Colonel, with a panic-tinged laugh, probably uttering the bravest sentence of his life.

"Hall you melonhead, I've killed cities! One tatterdemalian hooligan more or less will make no difference."

"Howie has a silver plate in his head from the War," said Jack. "The boches shot him down over Dresden, tortured him, burned his ranch..."

Jack was just talking, filling in the space between Patton and the Colonel.

"Hold on, Comrade General," put in Colonel Lindbergh, "if the man's a veteran, we should make allowances. A man who fights for his country deserves to cut loose some time..."

"Goddamnit Lindy, this bastard tried to fry us. He's a dangerous arsonist!"

"Respectfully, calm down. We don't want to spoil this lovely reception."

"No, uh, sir," put in Colonel Hall, relieved at having the Lone Eagle back him up, "I'll have this malefactor slapped in the guardhouse at Fort Baxter pending a full investigation."

"Just keep him out of my flightpath, you hear," said Patton, stabbing Colonel Hall in the chest with an unlit cigar.

Patton lit up, and puffed angry smoke, while Lindbergh stood over him, willing him to settle his feathers. Hall had the MPs bundle Howie into one of the jeeps. He grinned and waved at the crowds as if

he were sat next to the Homecoming Queen on the float at the Revolutionary Victory Parade. He exchanged a few words with his co-pilot and was unceremoniously driven off for a weekend's incarceration. Charlie heard they kept cattle prods and car batteries with crocodile clips and jump leads in the Fort Baxter guardhouse, and used them to re-educate political offenders. He guessed Howie's brains were too scrambled for the process to have much effect.

Everything calmed down again, and the reception was back on course.

It was time for the speeches to begin. He hoped the fliers might have something interesting to say, but he was experienced enough to realize the crowd was in for an hour or three of numbing boredom as various Party officials blew wind. Osgood Yandell was pulling twenty or thirty sheets of notes out of his briefcase. Charlie knew the Party Chairman would lecture the assembled multitudes on the Responsibilities of a Young Communist while Melvin, Philly and Chick sloped off to smoke cigarettes and play cards. Even after that, it was unlikely the fliers would treat them to anything more than the usual homilies about production targets and the Party. He hoped he would get a chance to talk to Colonel Lindbergh or one of the others later. The fliers would be presenting awards for achievement in the evening at the public reception. Since Charlie had a good shot at winning a medal, he hoped he'd meet Lindbergh on the dais as the award was pinned to his uniform. Then, he wouldn't mind how long the speeches had been.

Imagine: Charles Hardin Holley meets Lucky Lindy, the Lone Eagle.

Only in America...

"If I think about all the time I wasted listening to speeches I just wanna break down and cry. No, I mean it. As a good little Pioneer, I reckon I listened to an average seven hours a week of speeches. More at summer camp. If I'd spent that seven hours practising the guitar I'd be Segovia. It's not as though these people were any good at making speeches. When I was studying for my public speaking badge, the manual said you should strive to convince an audience through logic and historical determinism – whatever the Sam Hill that is – rather than inflaming artificial passions. Passing through Tennessee years ago, I heard one of those black guys, a Baptist hedge-preacher. Strictly illegal back then. You could wind up in Alaska for hallelujahing a hellfire sermon. There was a guy who could make a speech. I went in there an atheist humanist and in half an hour I was looking behind me for a sheriff with horns waiting to drag my sinful soul to the Hot Place. Very nearly signed up to become a Baptist there and then. Wore off, though. Now, where were we? Yeah, speeches..."

"First, Yandell made a speech welcoming the war heroes. He made lots of amusing references to 'flying forward for socialism' and was put out when only the Party juniors after his job even tried to laugh. Then Colonel Hall welcomed the war heroes. Then, plant director Hiram McGarrigle welcomed the war heroes. Then, union boss Bubby Cafferty, to everybody's surprise, welcomed the heroes. And Captain Rook, by way of a change, welcomed the heroes. It was obvious that welcoming the heroes was the keynote, and this

went on until well into the afternoon. If any heroes ever got welcomed, the RFS were they. I'm sure McCarthy was cat-napping, but the rest of them sat there being awesome. Lindy just glowed. He was golden.

"The biplane was still parked a few yards away. With Howie safe, Jack was no longer interested in the reception. He told me later that he could think of about eighteen things to do with your lips that beat welcoming the heroes from here to sundown. He took a toolbag from the cockpit and was tinkering in a leisurely manner with the engine, scat-singing non-patriotic music to himself. A few disapproving looks got lobbed his way, but no one wanted to interrupt the speeches by telling him to clear out, so he was left to himself. Two and a half hours later when all the speeches were finished, Jack was still head-deep in his engine cowl.

"General Patton made a mercifully brief address thanking the people of Roseville for their welcome – cue embarrassed smiles from Colonel Hall and company, and suppressed laughter, no doubt, among ideological backsliders out in the crowd – congratulating the workers on exceeding their targets and leaving it at that. The General promised that the RFS would have more to say at the award ceremony in the evening. 'Just so long,' he croaked with a threatening grin, 'as no one else tries to welcome the heroes...'

"The thing I remember about Patton is his eyes. He was a hero, but I got the impression he was also crazy. Lots of heroes like that, I guess, but I'd never thought about it. He sometimes claimed to be the reincarnation of Genghis Khan or Marshal Murat or someone. Looking back, I realize the Pentagon must have given him the RFS to keep him out of the way. Douglas MacArthur must have been enough for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Patton, who had some big hate thing going on with your General Montgomery, still occasionally suggested that dropping the Big Hot One on the lousy limeys would be a good idea, and might maybe convince them to lay off our ideological brothers in Malaya.

"Patton's address over, the good folk of Roseville let their hair down, at least as far as that was possible in Capone's America. The band played 'My Socialist Heart,' which Sinatra had had a hit with that year. By the time they were a few bars in, the heroes were being mobbed by the crowd. Everyone wanted a piece of the famous fliers, to get an autograph, a lock of hair, or just to hear them say something. All the girls got in there, and most of the boys. The Echo's photographer was popping flashbulbs, and the heroes were posing with lucky kids. Pete Horowitz, pushed forward by Rook, was snapped next to the Duke, and Melvin Yandell, Junior Hoodlum of the Decade, got to be pictured shaking hands with the Lone Eagle. Me, I was at the back, and kind of getting the idea that injustice was being done. Porky Rook was too busy with his protégé and hadn't given the order to fall out, and when he finally remembered, there were far too many folk around the heroes for me to hope to get close. But I figured they'd be there all weekend, so I'd get my chance to kiss ass eventually.

"So I was hanging about on the edge of this huge crowd, craning my neck to see what was going on. A voice asks me if I know anything about aero-engines.

Well, sure, of course I did. Next thing I know I'm helping Jack fix his engine. At first, I felt a bit embarrassed, because I didn't imagine it would go down well for a responsible little commie like me to be seen with a recidivist hooligan like Ti-Jack. After a while, though, it was okay, because it turned out I knew a lot more about planes than he did, and he seemed real impressed with the Texan kid. His fuel lead was leaking, and I patched it up neatly with first aid supplies. He introduced his plane to me as the H-1, more familiarly the Spruce Goose.

"She's a wonderful babe,' he said, 'but she's a woman jus' the same, and fickle. She likes to show temperament sometimes, likes to dump me and Howie on the ground, make us crawl a little. You have to love her for it.'

"I liked him at once, because he treated me as an adult. That's important when you're that age. More than anything else you wanna be grown up, but people still insist you're a kid. The other thing, the unique thing, was that he wasn't guarded. He said what he thought, while everyone else saw a Pioneer uniform and started doling out their words like pennies, worrying that you'd spot an Anti-Al sentiment and turn them in.

"Jack was shooting the breeze, talking about the Spruce Goose and Howie, their adventures flying across the country and back again. They made a subsistence living as freelance crop-sprayers and barnstormers, with Jack doing a side act as a singer and poet. Jack wasn't worried about his buddy being thrown in the slammer for the weekend. He would be getting three hots and a cot without paying a red cent, which put him well ahead of his usual game. Everything was a poem with Jack. Some of the stories he told me were lies, but they were true all the same. One of Jack's lies was worth an afternoon of Yandell's targets and incentives. One way or another, they just about managed to keep the show in the air, and – he said – he had got some great material for his book, his 'make-the-grade, paid-and-laid, break-for-great, beat-to-the-street book,' which was sort of true and sort of not and was about these two characters called Sal and Dean who weren't really Jack and Howie, but then again might be, and their lives in the currents above the USSA. 'I want to write a book like Gaillard plays jazz, like Van Gogh paints harvests, you dig?'

"Now, part of young Charlie was finding it profoundly shocking that this kind of thing could possibly happen in a well-ordered socialist society. But another part was listening to the music. Another part of me was being seduced. I dug.

"After a while, I dug the most."

The afternoon's parade passed off without incident, but Charlie was still smarting. Again, Captain Rook gave the lead to Pete Horowitz's section. The Pioneers led the parade, symbolizing the Great Socialist Hope of the nation's future. Charlie wondered if his rival was given preference because Rook had seen him consorting with Hooligan Jack. The Captain spoke of revisionism as if it were a communicable disease. The Pioneer Lodge had posters up, warning the true socialist to Watch Your Neighbours.

In an empty field, a number of tents and a small

stage had been erected. The formation broke, and Pioneers scattered in an orderly manner, heading for their families. Charlie found his parents and Peggy Sue's family by the lemonade stall. An ox was being roasted over a fire, a stocky chef from Fort Baxter sprinkling the revolving carcass with herbs and sauces. Charlie had never seen so much meat in one place before.

"Looks like some folks will be getting a good feed this evening," said his Mom, a little too loud. "Hero fliers and party officials, at least."

Dad gave him a glass of lemonade, which he got down in a gulp. It had been a long march in the sun.

Peggy Sue wore a pink-tinged white dress, and looked almost as pretty as Patsy, if a sight skinnier. Charlie saluted her, and she giggled like a six-year-old.

The chef got his hand too near the flame. He went "ooh ooh ooh" and hopped around while his base buddies laughed.

Osgood Yandell mounted the stage and, in a folksy voice Mom always said was "as phony as a his wife's hair colour," asked for everyone to give the heroes a big hand. It was time for the year's awards. But first, everyone knew, there were more speeches.

First up was General Patton. He did a familiar number about everyone all over the country pulling together in this time of crisis, increasing their production and striving to have more children to make the future secure for socialism. He called forward plant managers and union officials to congratulate them on the overrun. Each of the "heroes of tractor production" was given a small plaque.

"Funny how all them heroes just happen to be Kansas-born," said Peggy Sue's Dad. "Not a Texican among them."

Charlie's Dad shrugged and said they had no room for a plaque anyway.

"Nonsense," said Mom, "we could use it to plug up one of the holes in the wall that lets the wind in. What with all these heroes in town, I reckon there's going to be a lot more wind."

Next up was Duke Morrison, a big man who, according to the Party papers, embodied the virtues of the American worker. He told a thrilling story about how a buddy had died at Iwo Jima to save the rest of his platoon. His dying words had been "hell, Duke, I know any of the the guys would have done exactly the same." This, Morrison explained, "embodied the socialist spirit in the hearts of the people of America." There was massive but vaguely mechanical applause. It was the first remotely exciting thing that anyone had said all day. Morrison called forward factory workers who had been commended by their managers for working especially hard that year, for showing good examples to their comrades. Each man came forward, cheered by family and friends, to shake Morrison's hand and be awarded the Hero of Socialist Labour medal.

"More Kansans," said Peggy Sue's Dad, who had lost an eye fighting Villa.

"Hi Charlie-cat," said a voice behind him. "Have I missed any major gris-gris? Oh, unprecedented! They're roasting a whole ox! Man, that smells beat! What chance do you think we hungry cats have of getting our feed-forks into that? I'd be grateful for a plateful."

"With every Party official in the state of Kansas here tonight," said Mom, "we'll be lucky to get a lick of one of the bones."

Jack laughed. Charlie reddened at the disrespectful crack, and hoped nobody outside the group of Texans had heard his mother.

Morrison left the stage to enthusiastic cheers, and McCarthy took his place. The Major grabbed the microphone off the stand, and it squealed feedback. He broke all the rules of socialist reasoning, launching into a fire-and-brimstone tirade about how the country was "in danger of being brought sobbing to its knees by the cancers of counter-revolution, capitalist subversion, foreign fifth-columnists and moral degeneracy." McCarthy was sweating, and the audience didn't know what to make of his shouting. Even his fellow heroes were trying not to look at him.

"It's the duty of every loyal American," he said, "to root out cap subversion wherever it rears its hideous, verminous head. On the farm, in the workplace, and, yes, even in your own family. It starts quiet. Maybe some schoolteacher wants to hold a meeting to yak about the problems of the community. Then, after your closet cap pal has started you thinking that maybe there are problems in the community, the hard stuff starts creepin' in, and you hear talk about maybe havin' elections, or questionin' the Party Line, or sayin' bad stuff about Comrade Capone. And it gets worse. Once cap subversion has set in, it's harder to get rid of than headlice. Remember, your ole grand-mamma could be a filthy cap, or maybe your General Store-keeper, the man next to you on the assembly line... Caps are everywhere, eatin' away the foundations of society."

He pulled a grimy piece of paper out of his jacket pocket. "I got me here a list off sixty-eight card-carrying caps in the Kansas Party Machine, legislature and Socialist Guard, and believe me, comrades, these rats are gonna regret the day they tried to cross Bomber Joe!"

He waved his list. There was a stunned silence from the crowd for a full ten seconds. Charlie heard Jack let out a low, admiring whistle. Then people applauded. Charlie couldn't understand it. The Major was obviously combat-shocked. People were applauding louder, spontaneously, energetically. He looked around. His own parents were clapping, and Peggy Sue's Dad was whistling as if the home team were celebrating a touchdown.

"Clap," Mom told him, "if you know what's good for you, clap..."

Charlie listlessly flapped his hands together, and McCarthy revelled in the acclaim. Jack was the only person not joining in. The poet shrugged and smiled. Charlie wondered if Jack's name were on any lists.

"Applause," Jack said, "applesauce..."

The applause continued as Lindbergh took the stage. In quiet, measured tones he endorsed Capone's policy of isolationism. America, he said, could produce everything it needed without getting involved with other countries. He was plainly remembering by rote something someone else had written for him. He finished his brief speech by announcing more awards. Three townswomen who had borne more than five children were invited forward to receive Heroine of Socialist Motherhood medals.

Charlie knew what was coming next.

"And now, one of the most important awards any community can bestow," said the Lone Eagle, "the Young America medal for this year's most conscientious member of the Pioneers."

Charlie checked that his bandanna was tied properly, and his shorts creases were aligned to the front. He knew he would win the Young America. Nobody had won more badges than him, and his section always scored the highest in the Socialist Debates.

"...And the winner is..."

To receive the medal from Colonel Lindbergh himself, to shake the great man's hand...

"Section Leader Peter Horowitz."

Pete Horowitz went forward to climb up on to the stage, accompanied by applause. Charlie looked over and saw Captain Rook clapping, broad smile on his puffy face. Horowitz threw a ragged parody of a salute and accepted his medal.

"Well, how do you like that!"

"What's the bring-down?" asked Jack.

"You tell me! You saw the parade this afternoon. Now tell me, Pioneer for Pioneer, badge for badge, section for section, who's the better man? Me or that sloppy, lame-assed, worthless Kansas goldbrick who's just shook hands with Colonel Lindbergh?"

"Diable, Charlie-cat, that's easy. I bet the brown-eyed handsome boy wouldn't know one end of an engine from another."

"Pete Horowitz's section would come third in the Circle Jerk. So how come he wins the goddamn medal, huh? I just don't understand it."

"Who decides who gets the medals?"

"Captain Comrade Rook."

"Uh-huh. That him over there? The fat cat in the army slouch hat and shorts, clapping and sweating?"

"Yeah. The bastard. What's he got against me?"

"I don't imagine he's got anything against you, Charlie-cat. It's what he's got for Pretty Petey."

"What are you talking about?" asked Charlie.

"I guess," said Jack quietly, "Captain Comrade Rook is victim of a particular variety of sexual incontinence."

"He's always talking about sexual incontinence. He wouldn't..."

"I didn't say he's done anything, the poor cold and old sister-sap, nor that he'd necessarily try anything. All I'm saying is that such thoughts prey upon him in his secret nights. He has the hots for the guy; in spades, but bad. Nothing amiss with that, Charlie-cat, so long as nobody gets hurt."

"Well, I've ended up getting hurt. This isn't fair."

Charlie's eyes stung. Pioneers weren't supposed to feel hurt. Peggy Sue had walked over. If she had overheard, it would make it worse.

"Hi, Charlie," she said brightly, "tough luck about not getting the medal. If you want my opinion, you should have got it. And everyone in town would agree with me..."

"Except that Horowitz cat," said Jack.

Charlie was relieved by the opportunity to change the subject and introduced the girl next door.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr Kerouac," said Peggy Sue, "though I'm not sure I want to meet your partner after what he did to my sister."

"Yeah, well, I'm sorry about that, chicklet. I guess



Howie doesn't always have the right etiquette for every social situation. He gets a little bit wigged-out sometimes, and goes uncool. Accept my sincerest..."

Peggy Sue warmed to Jack at once, and fluttered her eyelashes. Charlie didn't know how he felt about that.

Lieutenant Hubbard had taken the stage to make his speech, clearly the worse for something. Fruit punch and cider were not covered by the Prohibition Laws. Hubbard had a broad smile and a benign, avuncular manner and was talking about the duty of everyone to get married and have healthy communist children to keep America strong. He called forward a dozen couples who had announced their engagement in the last year. Each received a salute of solidarity from Hubbard and a radio for when they set up home. He made gruff jokes Charlie didn't quite get which usually made the prospective groom laugh uneasily while his fiancée blushed.

Charlie noticed that as each lucky pair went up to the stage, Peggy Sue was applauding and cheering loudly. "Gee, Mr Kerouac," she spoke across Charlie, making him feel uncomfortable again, "don't you think it's wonderful? Are you married, Mr Kerouac?"

"No chicklet. I'm not married just now. No lady in her right mind would want a hipster like me. And I don't especially desire a radio that plays nothing but propaganda all the day and night, either."

"Are you a recidivist?" she asked, half-sternly, half-mockingly.

"Actually, like they say, I believe in freedom and fair shares. Cool stuff, you know. It's just that I also believe a radio should be for digging decent music. Jazz and jive, baby, bebop-ba-bop-bop."

Peggy Sue laughed.

Patton returned to the microphone, also a drink past his best, by the look of him. His tie was skewed around his collar, his top shirt button was undone, and sweat was pouring out from under his helmet. He looked like a shifty cap subversive in one of the Hollywood movies J. Edgar Hoover liked to sponsor, *I Was a Capitalist for the FBI* or *I Married a Capitalist*. The characteristic half-smoked stogie poked from the corner of his mouth as he requested the presence of Osgood Yandell.

"I have here, Comrade Party Chief," he began, "a gift for the people of Roseville from Chairman Capone himself."

There were cheers from the audience as he tore brown wrapping paper from a rectangular object. The present was as a framed colour print, depicting a matronly woman in turn-of-the-century clothes standing at the rail of a ship, holding her baby up to see, looming in the distance, the Statue of Liberty. It was Norman Rockwell's famous impression of the arrival in the Land of the Free of the infant Capone. Patton presented it to Yandell to be hung in the town hall. Yandell made a brief speech of startled gratitude and then announced that the party was to begin. On cue, the town band struck up a waltz.

"Come on, Charlie, and you too, Mr Kerouac," said Peggy Sue, pulling both of them. "My mother's baked some of her special pies."

She dragged Charlie and Jack over towards a food-laden table where other members of the Roseville proletariat were congregating. In the opposite corner of

the field, the roast ox was being devoured by Party officials and their families.

Charlie, Jack and Peggy Sue were sitting down to apple pie and cream as a shadow came up on them from behind.

"Whaddya hear, whaddya say, ace?" said the shadow's voice.

They turned. It was Howie.

"Howie, most esteemed cat. You busted out of the doghouse I see. I'm sore afraid I finished off all the hooch."

"Shit," said Howie, not noticing Peggy Sue's presence. "Suppose I'll just have to drink some of this god-awful cider. Jeez, this'll be the ruination of my liver."

"So how'd you contrive to skip the joint, Howie?" asked Jack.

"Piece of cake. I was being guarded by this motor-pool sergeant and the crummiest bunch of GI Joes you ever saw. I won out in a poker game."

"Howie, I'd like to introduce mes amis. The chicklet is Peggy Sue. You encountered her big sister this morning, remember. And this is Charlie-cat, the coolest corn-fed Pioneer in Kansas."

"Pleased to meetcha, pilgrims. I'm gonna go requisition me a drink, and see if I can get me some of that cow on a stick they're burning over in the VIP area. Think I'll pass muster as a Party official?"

Howie grinned, showing his ravaged teeth. He stank of booze and aviation fuel. Close up, with his tall, skinny frame and filthy grey hair, the last thing he looked like was a Party official. He reminded Charlie of a scarecrow, only not so well dressed.

"Check, Squadron Leader," said Jack, "but take care how you go. Patton is still out there, and I presume he still wants you refrigerated."

"Patton? Fuck 'im - pardon my French ma'am."

Howie hawked and spat a stream of brown juice at the grass.

"Say kid," he said to Charlie, "you think these famous fly-boys are something special?"

"Of course," said Charlie, "they're the best pilots living in America today. Probably the world."

"Hogwash and flapdoodle. None of those old blowhards could fly for chickenfeed. Sure, they can drive an airplane, any damfool can drive an airplane. I wouldn't give you a torn lunch coupon for any of them. 'Cept maybe Lindbergh. He had it once, he had the stuff. But not any more."

"But what about their war records..." protested Charlie.

Howie grinned cynically. "Lindbergh, yeah, I'd believe his. But the rest of them are feeding you a line, kid. Specially Lafayette Hubbard... Listen, I gotta get me some chow and a drink..."

He sniggered to himself and turned to go.

"By the way," he added, "when I was on my way over here, I walked by that stage up there and tripped up. Clean put my boot through that picture of the broad showing the brat Miss Liberty. Big hole in the brat's face. I get the feeling the picture was important, so if anyone asks, it wasn't me, okay?"

"It's hard to remember exactly how I felt. You always look back on love affairs like they were songs - 'True Love Ways,' you know - and forget the pain. I liked Jack but he was scary,

troubling. He was weird, but he meant what he said, unlike a lot of the non-weirds I knew. I even kind of liked being 'Charlie-cat.' It was better than being 'Pioneer Holley' and certainly beat 'Texas faggot.' But Howie was dangerous, crazy. If he wasn't on McCarthy's lists, then he ought to have been. I'm not saying he was a cap, but he sure was a subversive element. Remember, Mr Lowe, the things Howie was saying could have got him shot. And me and Peggy Sue shot too, or put in a work-camp, just for listening.

"Next, Patsy turned up. She kept out of Howie's way, but took a Texas shine to handsome Jack. Peggy Sue might be working up to her badge in eyelash-fluttering but Patsy was unchallenged tri-county champion. And as a ladies' man, Jack was faster on the draw than Wyatt Earp. Being around him when he was pitching woo was a complete education. A lot more useful than Enemy Aircraft Recognition. As Jack took Patsy out into the field to dance, I managed to nerve up to take Peggy Sue and follow them. I had my badge in dancing. After a few numbers, Jack left Patsy for a moment and went over to the band-leader, a coloured boy from Fort Baxter. There were more than a few negroes in his orchestra, but because there was still segregation in the army they had to sit apart. Jack and the band-leader had a short, intense conversation and parted with a slapping handshake. Jack came back smiling with half his mouth, and took Patsy by the waist while new orders were issued. A couple of whites with brass instruments stood down, and a black bassist lost his bow. Then, the band played the kind of music you didn't hear on the radio. Jack showed Patsy how to dance. The rest of the crowd couldn't fit their moves to the rhythm and stood around, not offended, while Jack showed them how. Then, everyone – including Peggy Sue and me – was dancing. It wasn't my stuff, exactly, but that jazz combo cum hootenanny sounded different. And it was exciting. The Young America medal didn't mean so much any more..."

Charlie was enjoying himself. And he knew Peggy Sue was enjoying herself. At the end of a dance while the musicians were wiping away sweat, he bowed with a flourish and kissed her hand just as Clark Gable had Tallulah Bankhead's in *Gone With the Wind*.

"Oh Charlie," giggled the girl, "you're getting mushy."

Charlie looked at Peggy Sue's pleasantly flushed throat as she fanned herself, trying not to stare. Was she beautiful? Check. Was he in love with her? Tricky. Was he on the slippery path into sexual incontinence? No. Well...

"Bay-aby!" grunted a voice. 'Howsabout having a li'l fun with the air force. Let's get with this jungle bunny jive. Decadent cap crap, of course, but it gits the juices flowin'."

Peggy Sue turned around and cringed as Major McCarthy shoved his leering face at her. He grabbed her waist and puckered up his lips. Charlie was not sure what he should do. McCarthy's left hand was going for Peggy Sue's bottom, fingers splaying out to dig in violently.

"Charlie..." she cried as she tried to escape.

Charlie tapped McCarthy's shoulder politely. "Excuse me, sir..."

McCarthy turned, eyes red. "Bug off, kid! Can't you see I'm fuckin' engaged on official business?"

"Pardon me, Comrade Major McCarthy, sir," Charlie stood his ground. "But I don't think the young lady wishes to do business with you. Further, sir, she is fifteen years old."

"Who asked your opinion, kid?" McCarthy let Peggy Sue go and pushed his booze-reeking face into Charlie's. "You look like a filthy cap..."

"Nobody asked my opinion, sir. But with respect, you did not ask the opinion of the young lady as to whether she wished to, ah, dance with you."

McCarthy began shaking, like a movie volcano about to explode.

"I'm a fuckin' war hero kid, I can do what I fuckin' please."

With no further warning, he swung his right fist in a long, fast arc, connecting with Charlie's face.

Charlie fell backwards, tasting blood, glasses flying. McCarthy shouted at him, calling him names. Charlie groped for his glasses as the crowd, then the band fell quiet. Peggy Sue was sobbing like a lost child.

"Come on then, revisionist kid. Fuckin' get up, fuckin' put yer mitts up. Mess with Bomber Joe and see what you get..."

Someone helped Charlie to his feet. His view of McCarthy was suddenly blocked by the shape of Jack.

Jack threw a series of short, powerful punches at the Major's face. McCarthy was powerless to stop or parry the blows. The hero's fists flailed about uselessly as he screamed abuse.

McCarthy slid to the ground, floored by a combination of punches and punch. Black blood fell in large drips from his nose.

Men in uniform pushed their way through the circle that had gathered. Hubbard and Morrison grabbed Jack, pinning his arms behind his back. He did not struggle. Patton strode up, with Osgood Yandell a respectful three paces behind him.

"What the hell's going on here?" he asked quietly, removing the cigar butt from his mouth to spit away pieces of tobacco.

"I can explain, Comrade General, sir," volunteered Charlie. "Major McCarthy grabbed hold of the young lady. She didn't like it and I asked him to stop. Then he hit me. Then the comrade here..."

"Is that so, Comrade Major?" asked Patton.

He was still sitting on the ground trying to staunch his nose. He had reached into a pocket for a handkerchief, but had come up with only his list of card-carrying capitalists. The list was thoroughly bled-on.

Before McCarthy could answer, there was another stirring in the crowd.

"Make way for a war veteran, war veteran coming through," said Howie, striding towards Jack, noticing nothing but his friend. "Hya ace, I got us some of that burned cow. Said I was an FBI agent in disguise on a special investigation. I got some booze from the VIP tent as well... Oh, shit. Good evening Comrade General Patton, sir. Would you like a drink? Say, could you spare me one of them cigars?"

Instinctively, Patton drew both his fancy revolvers, the ones Capone had given him. Howie grinned as the General levelled his weapons at him. Simultaneously, Patton pulled the triggers, and, simultaneously, the pistols misfired, burping smoke. Howie laughed.

"Hubbard," Patton snarled, his face bright red, "go and fetch some MPs. If you can't find any, then get me a gun. Any kind of gun. Understood?"

"Sir, yes sir!" snapped Hubbard, leaving Jack to Morrison.

"Hold up there a minute, Comrade General," said Howie, "I didn't escape or anything. I earned my freedom. Besides, if you want to have me shot, which I'm sure is entirely within your rights, ain't there certain due processes of the socialist law that have to be gone through first?"

"It may have escaped your attention," said Patton, "but we are the socialist law. And just as soon as that moron gets back with a gun I'm going to shoot you without any further questions."

Charlie looked around, wondering where Lindbergh was, hoping he'd turn up to calm the General down.

Howie bit ferociously into a piece of meat. "In that case," he said, "you wouldn't wanna deny a man on death row one last request."

Patton looked shiftily at the crowd around him, not sure how to take this. "Of course not," he said as loudly as he could manage, "let it never be said that the American Communist Party is inhumane. Name your request."

"I'd like a few minutes of everyone's time, that's all."

Charlie looked at Jack, whose face was a blank. Things had stopped being funny.

"You see, Comrade General sir, I'm a flier like you. I don't have any of these fancy birds from American Motors or Progress Dynamics. All I've got's a ship I made from the parts on up. I designed the H-1 myself, put it together with gum and prayer. I'm just a bum with wings, but I can out-fly any of you pilots any day of the week with a y in it."

"Yeah!" shouted Morrison, letting Jack go and squaring up massively to Howie. "*That'll be the day!*"

"Darn right it will, Duke," said Howie, looking the tall man in the eye. "You guys don't scare me. 'Cause at sundown, you're all shit and wind. Take you slobs out of your uniforms, and you'd be nothing. And your so-called war-records are nothing. I coulda been the best fighter jock in the Navy or the Air Force, but when the War came along they told me I was too old and 'not politically correct,' I told 'em that wasn't important, but no, they wouldn't have me. I ended up a bus-driver, flying Gooney Birds to Pacific Islands. Then, I did hop-and-skip runs behind our lines in Europe. But it was something, I was in the service..."

He raised his voice, talking not just to Patton but to the whole crowd.

"Do you know something, ladies and gentlemen, I didn't hear about a single one of these aces all that time. I met all the real ones, the real heroes, Dick Bong, Jimmy Stewart, Dolittle. But they never talked about any of you. Except General Patton, of course. You all know about him. He must have personally shortened the War by about six months when he hopped on that plane and flattened that SS Death Division, getting there before his own troops, saving everybody from that horde of kill-crazed, fight-to-the-last-man Nazis. I saw Old Guts and Glory here in '45 in Germany. He spent a whole day behind the stick of

the Boeing that dropped the incendiaries on Berlin. He was being filmed for the newsreels. While this was going on, I talked to his crew. They were riled up that some army gloryhound pushed in and took over from their regular pilot. Plus, it seems the General was more enthusiastic than accurate when it came to dropping the payload. Seems he just plain missed the fortifications he was supposed to be destroying and heroically blew up a hospital, a church and a children's playground. Of course, them sick folks, nuns and school-kids could've put up a hell of a fight, lengthened the War some. That SS Division? Well, it seems there wasn't one. That was just a bit of left-over kraut propaganda, trying to discourage our boys."

Patton just stared, jaw muscles working.

"So what about the rest of them?" continued Howie. "The way I hear it, McCarthy spent most of the War visiting his sick mother in Canada. Duke here was in all the main theatres of combat, with the newsreels long after the fighting had moved on to somewhere else. Lonesome Lafayette's record is a joke. The only thing he ever sunk was a tug. One of our own. He thought the Japs were invading Catalina and strafed it. After that, the only thing the Navy would let him do was write adventure stories for *Leatherneck*. That's the Marines' paper, by the way. The Navy didn't even trust him to write dime novels for their own pulp..."

"Comrade General, I've got a gun," came Hubbard's voice. He was pushing through, dragging Colonel Hall. "D'you want to shoot him now?"

"Lieutenant Hubbard," said Howie, "we were just talking about you."

"You can see the fix Patton was in. If he had Howie shot now, it'd look like the bum had been telling the truth about their war records. Also, he was mad as hell about losing face in front of people who were supposed to respect him. It ended with Patton challenging Howie to a flying contest at sun-up the next day. I suppose he must have figured Howie for an old madman who'd be a pushover. The arrangement was that first they'd out-fly Howie, then they'd take him out and shoot him. It suited Howie fine. So long as he got the chance to show Roseville what 'pudknockers' the RFS were, they could do what they liked to him. Then, Lindbergh arrived. Standing nearby, I heard McCarthy, who had sobered up fast, tell him what had happened. Lindbergh was floored. McCarthy was in favour of the contest, telling him what a hoot it'd be, but Lindbergh said it was too risky. They all were in danger of losing their privileges, and if they screwed the pooch they'd end up drilling for oil in Alaska. He flatly refused to have anything to do with the deal. But the rest were gung ho to restore their reputations. So, Howie formally accepted the challenge..."

"Jack, is Howie crazy?" asked Charlie. Jack and Patsy and Peggy Sue and Charlie were sitting out back watching the moon and the stars.

"No idea, Charlie-cat. Why don't you ask him?"

"I would, but we don't know where he's got to."

"Do you think they've got him locked up somewhere?" asked Patsy.

"No, heartbeat. I don't think they'll dare do that."

Charlie's parents had seen everything that had happened earlier. Dad had come over when the shouting was finished and had ordered him home at once. Mom, on the scene shortly afterwards, had taken an immediate liking to Jack and had invited him, and Peggy Sue and Patsy, back home for supper, and had eagerly pumped Jack with questions about what was happening in other parts of America. Dad hadn't been too pleased about having the glamorous recidivist in their midst. It could get them into trouble. But he didn't call the shots in the Holley household.

"Jack, how come they won't dare to lock Howie up? Or you?"

"Because they'd like us to take a breeze before the big showdown. None of those squares is a natural flier the way Howie is. What they're hoping is that Howie'll be so piss-scared at the idea of being shot he'll skedaddle. That way they might not have the kick of killing him, but it'll save them the possible humiliation of losing the challenge. And it would also kinda prove to cats round here that Howie was talking moonshine all along. Thing is, I reckon Howie can outfly the best of them. Zoom, zoom."

"But you don't have to get in that plane tomorrow," said Patsy.

"Howie needs a bombardier. This is my trip as much as it is his."

"Aren't you frightened, Mr Jack?" asked Peggy Sue.

"Sure I'm frightened. But I'm frightened every time I climb into the Spruce Goose with that old hipster. It's not a biplane, you know; it's a bop-plane. She has her own ways, and just goes along however she wants. Besides, what else could a no-account deadbeat like me do? Any ideas?"

"You could be a real writer," suggested Peggy Sue.

"Or a newspaperman. That's writing too," added Patsy.

Jack laughed. "Sure, I could write anything the Party lets me write. Or I could be a garbage collector, or a farm hand, or a short-order cook, or a soldier... I could be lots of things, but, dig, the only thing that feels right is doing what I do now. Maybe I'll grow out of it. Most people spend their lives not really knowing what they should do."

"I know what I want to do," said Charlie, "I want to be a pilot."

"And end up like Howie?" giggled Patsy.

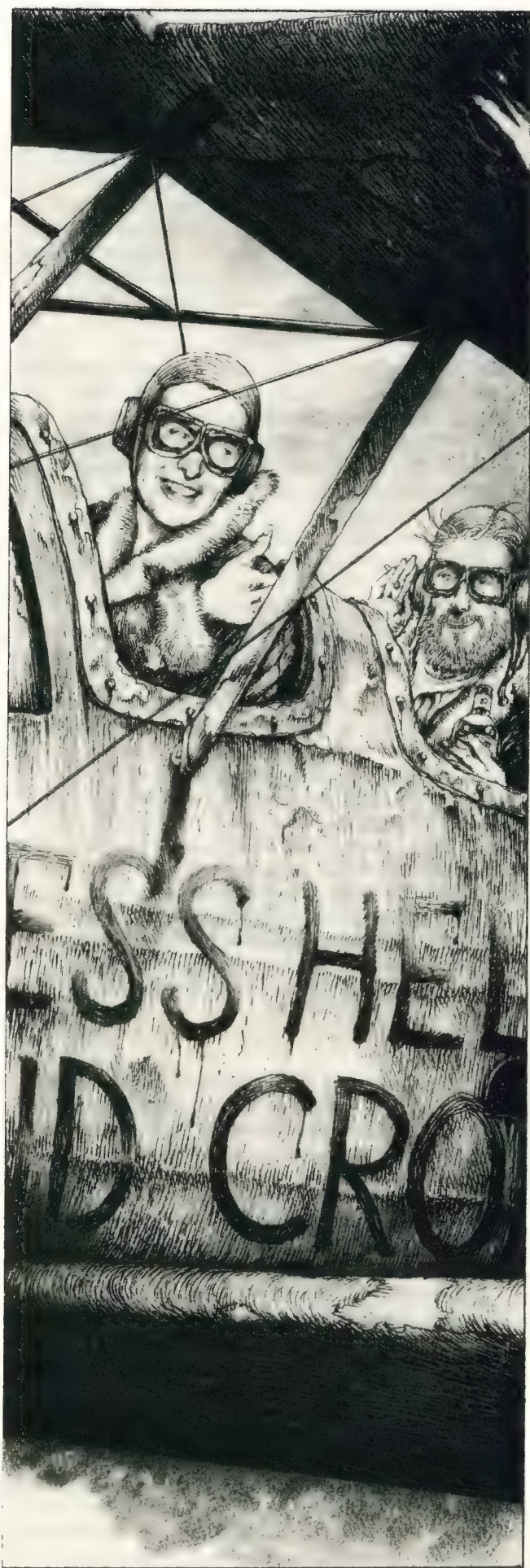
"I think I'd sooner be Lindbergh," smiled Charlie. "Even Howie reckons he's all right."

"The thing about Howie," said Jack, "is that he's a better cat than I am. He's crazy, but he's true to his heartbeat. Flying's about the only thing he's good at. Everything else he touches, he screws up. Flying's what he lives for. As long as he can fly it doesn't matter. That's his heartbeat. Everyone is born with a heartbeat, a rhythm inside that tells them what to do. Some have a heartbeat that says President of the USSA, some get a heartbeat that says hobo. It doesn't matter. Just so long as you follow your heartbeat."

"I'm going to follow mine," said Charlie, arms out like wings.

"But are you one hundred per cent sure it's what you're supposed to do?" asked Jack.

"Yeah, sure. That is, I guess so." Jack picked up his guitar and played a few folk songs he'd learned on his travels. After a song about a hundred men losing



their lives in a mine disaster, he decided to lighten the mood a little and began to improvise, strumming a few chords, making up words as he went along...

"Heartbeat," he said, looking at Patsy, "why do you miss when my baby kisses me?"

He tried to make up a tune, but wasn't very sure about it. "My thing is words," he said, "not chords."

"Heartbeat," Charlie said, hearing a tune.

"You know," said Peggy Sue, "there's a song for every girl in my class except me. Clementine Carter, Susannah Hickling, Genevieve Dieudonné, Adeline Williams, all of them. But no Peggy Sue song."

"My Darling Peggy Sue," said Patsy, laughing.

"Oh Peggy Sue, don't you cry for me," sang Jack, off-key.

"Peggy Sue," crooned Charlie to notes that came his way, "if you knew..."

Jack reached over, put a hand on Patsy's neck, and they were kissing.

Charlie ran out of words. Jack's mouth was working away, and Patsy wasn't resisting. He and Peggy Sue were surplus personnel.

Peggy Sue turned to Charlie, eyes a liquid in the dark. "I guess it's time I went home. Want to walk me back, Charlie?"

"Walk you back? You only live next door."

The girl's eyes narrowed, and Charlie decided to go along with her. Somehow, it took a long time to get next door.

As they walked slowly away from Jack and Patsy, towards the line of dimly-lit tin and weatherboard shacks, Peggy Sue slipped her hand into Charlie's. Her palm was already as rough as a cowboy's from hard work in the junior auxiliary at the tractor plant on Sunday mornings.

Charlie couldn't forget the music the band had played, and the tunes Jack had tried to wring out of his guitar.

Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue, if you knew...

"Well..." said Peggy Sue as they arrived at her gate.

"See you tomorrow?" said Charlie.

"Yes. Tomorrow. Yes, see you then," she said, looking him straight in the face, smiling.

Charlie felt nervous. He didn't want to leave her. Not just yet.

Next thing he knew, he was kissing her. Or she was kissing him. Not the sort of peck on the cheek his mother had made him perform in party games when he was a kid. This was the big-league thing. They were holding one another tight, and grinding their lips together, like people did in the kind of movies that Charlie didn't really enjoy, like Jack and Patsy back in the field. They said nothing. Just took time out every once in a while to look at each other before they got back to it again.

Finally. "Peggy Sue...uh, chicklet...there's something I'd like to ask you..."

Peggy Sue smiled, expecting. Then, they heard a girl screaming. The moment was gone.

They ran to the back of Charlie's house and could see a number of moonlit figures moving around. The girl screamed again. It was Patsy.

"Stay here, Peggy Sue," said Charlie, running off towards the ruckus.

"That'll be the day," she shouted, running after him. "That's my sister they're hurting."

As Charlie got nearer the noise, he could see that it was not Patsy they were hurting at all. Three men with pickaxe handles or baseball bats were hitting a figure curled up on the ground. The victim had his arms over his head. It was Jack.

Charlie pulled his glasses off and handed them to Peggy Sue. "Look after these," he said, "and don't come an inch nearer."

Shit, Charlie thought to himself as he ran towards the men. Three of them, pickaxe handles. I'm going to get killed. Still he ran on...

He couldn't see so well without his glasses, but he could tell who the thugs were. Chick Willis, Philly Winspear and Melvin Yandell. That was predictable. If anyone was going to be beating anyone else up in Roseville, Murderous Melvin and his buddies would elect themselves.

"Patsy!" he shouted, "get away before the bastards try and hurt you!"

Melvin turned from belabouring Jack. "Look what we got here, guys! It's Chocolate Soldier Charlie. Come to join in the fun, Texas limp dick?"

Charlie stopped. He knew he was going to get killed. He took a deep breath, tried to remember some of his Pioneer unarmed combat training, and charged straight at Melvin.

He wasn't moving.

With all that adrenaline pumping, it took him a moment to realize arms were holding him back. He struggled, but couldn't move forward. Melvin laughed, turned back to Jack, fetched him one final, savage swipe and started to walk away. Willis and Winspear also got in their last licks, and scurried after Melvin, hooting and laughing.

Still the arms held Charlie back as the sobbing Patsy was joined by Peggy Sue and the two women went over to Jack. He was on the ground, groaning, mumbling in French.

"Pauvre Ti-Jack, pauvre..."

Charlie tried to twist his head and see who was holding him. It was no good. He looked down at the arms. Uniformed arms. In the moonlight, three cuffbars glinted in the moonlight. He knew who it was.

"What you so scared of, Colonel Lindbergh?" screamed Charlie. "That the Party brats you bought to beat up Jack are going to beat me up too?"

Lindbergh let go of him, and turned to walk in silence back towards town. Charlie watched the Lone Eagle go, and spat at his shadow.

"Chicken," he yelled.

Jack was groaning, and the girls were sniffing.

Someone else came out of the dark. Charlie waited for another attack, but it never came.

"So here the hell you all are," said Howie. "I wondered where you'd gotten to...Cheezis, what happened to my bombardier?"

"I had it all at once, Mr Lowe, in two days. I met Jack and Howie, very deeply interesting people who were to be more of an influence on my life than I'd realize. Second, I kissed a girl for the first time. Third, the greatest living hero of my childhood had revealed himself for a worthless coward. Plus, I was starting to think about music. Yes sir, it was quite a weekend. Here, have another drink..."

"We got Jack back to my place, and woke up my

Mom, who dug out her First Aid stuff. She did a quick diagnosis, and told us he wasn't going to die. He was suffering from concussion, half a dozen cracked ribs, a couple of broken fingers and a fracture in his right arm. She spent almost two hours setting bones and taping on makeshift splints. Then, she went back to bed, leaving us all – Howie, Jack, me, Peggy Sue, Patsy – drinking coffee. That wasn't like her. She said Jack should rest up, but she didn't tell us to stop bothering him, she didn't kick the girls out, and, most particularly, she didn't tell me to get off to bed double-quick. Thinking about it, I guess she had a fair idea what we were going to discuss, and how it would turn out...

“You're in no fit state to fly with me tomorrow,” Howie said to Jack.

“Course I am. I can just about move my left hand.”

“Howie's right,” said Patsy, “you can't possibly fly. You'd be a danger to the pair of you.”

“I'll take your place,” said Charlie.

“What?!” said Jack. “Non, Charlie-cat, you don't dig how that plane works. You might get cooled. Even if you don't, the Party skulls will blacklist you for succouring a hooligan. They're going to shoot Howie tomorrow. Lord knows what the evils will do to you, but it won't be cool.”

“I don't care,” said Charlie. “Those people were my heroes. Now I realize what a bunch of yellow-bellied creeps they are. If Howie's going to take them down, I'd like to help.”

“Hell, kid,” said Howie, “look at me. I'm a burned out coot. I got nothing left to lose. You've got everything coming up ahead of you. Don't throw it away.”

Charlie was unmoved. “You need a co-pilot. I've had 122½ hours in planes, over 250 hours on gliders. I've got Pioneer badges in navigation and dive bombing. If you're going to show those pudknockers who's best tomorrow, I want to be part of it.”

“Charlie-cat,” sighed Jack. “It's your play. If you're going to do it, let me give you some advice. Hold tight, go to the crapper first and take a lump of leather to bite on.”

“Fine, I'll remember that.”

“Attaboy, Charlie,” said Howie. “If you're so determined to put your ass on the line, then it's fine by me. Just don't let it be said that we didn't try to talk you out of it. I can't say what'll happen to you afterwards, but you've got no problems in the air. You're nearly 16, you must be a better pilot than George Patton. And I need someone to drop the bombs and watch my ass and light the cigars and pass the bottle.”

“I didn't sleep too well, for the second night running. Early next morning, I followed Jack's advice and spent a good half an hour in the outhouse.

“I snuck out and found Peggy Sue waiting for me. She gave me a wet kiss and a rabbit's foot and asked me, somewhat unromantically I thought, if I'd been to the privy.

“Off we walked to Baxter Field. By now word had gotten round, and there were plenty of folks turning up to see the show. Most of town, in fact. About half an hour after I arrived, Mom and Dad showed. I kept my head low because I hadn't told them that I was

going to be part of it. There were a lot of soldiers about, and the motor-pool sergeant was rumoured to be taking bets on the big contest, offering long odds on Crazy Howie and the Flying Deathtrap against the RFS.

“I got up to the Spruce Goose, and Howie was fooling around with the engine, drunk as a skunk of course. He even offered me a pull on the bottle. ‘Want some breakfast, kid?’ he said. He also stated as Gospel that he'd never flown sober in his life and doubted he ever could.

“Scary stuff, huh? But the hand-on-heart truth is that I wasn't scared. This was my big chance to pay off Lindbergh and McCarthy and the others for letting me down, for destroying my illusions. I couldn't give the steam off a cow flop for the consequences. I suppose every sixteen-year-old thinks he's immortal. I wasn't worried about the flying, I wasn't worried what might happen to me afterward. Worst of all, I wasn't worried for what might happen to my parents, or Patsy or Peggy Sue. What can I say? I was a self-righteous little bastard.”

The heroes of the RFS strode out across the tarmac. Hubbard and McCarthy looked hung-over. Patton, who hadn't bothered to shave, tossed another cigar-butt to one side and started pulling on his flying-jacket. Morrison strode coolly along, bringing up the rear.

Lindbergh saw Charlie fitting Jack's flying-helmet over his head.

“Keep out of this, son. This isn't your fight.”

“With respect, Comrade Colonel Lindbergh, sir,” Charlie replied, “this is my fight. You used to be my hero. I wanted to grow up to be just like you. But last night I saw you acting like a sneaky two-faced yellow bastard. So even if the man you had beaten up wasn't a friend of mine, I have to take you on. I'm doing it on behalf of every kid in America who looks up to you without realizing what an asshole you are. Sir.”

“From cringing geek to pompous numbskull in one overnight step, eh,” said McCarthy. “Where's your ripe girlfriend?”

Lindbergh's face closed as McCarthy breathed fumes.

“We can call this off right now,” said the Lone Eagle.

“Yes sir,” replied Charlie. “We can...if you let Howie here go and promise not to harm him.”

“No way!” snapped Patton. “Lindy, cut out the whining and fly.”

Patton proposed stunts, and Howie agreed to everything with a nod.

“Might as well put on a show for the folks who turned out to see this dogfight,” said Patton.

Lindbergh muttered something about Helldivers being built for killing Japs not barnstorming, and walked away to one of the huge blue craft to get into his flying jacket before climbing into the cockpit. He was joined by Morrison who took the back seat of the plane.

Patton tossed Charlie two small wooden practise bombs and said “you know what to do with these, four-eyes?” Charlie nodded, and Patton and McCarthy climbed into the other Helldiver.

Hubbard stayed behind as ground crew. He would, he had said, do as he usually did at RFS air displays

and take the microphone on the grandstand and provide the public with a running commentary.

"Enough hot air for a Montgolfier balloon," Howie spat as Hubbard test-woofed into the mike.

The air-cooled engines of the powerful Navy planes coughed, then roared into life, spewing huge gobs of unhealthy black smoke from the engine-cowl exhausts.

Charlie climbed into the front cockpit of the Spruce Goose and belted himself in securely. From behind, Howie shouted "connnnnnn-tacttt!!" and the engine turned over. It spluttered into action, shaking the plane so badly that Charlie was worried it would fall apart long before they got airborne.

The four-bladed props of the Helldivers, each as long as a full-grown man, spun smoothly. Charlie looked behind him at the stocky planes. The difference between them and the H-1 was like that between a healthy 20-year-old quarterback and an infirm, wheezing old man.

The Helldivers taxied out to the main part of the asphalt runway, pulled even more power from their engines and in an instant were airborne, just a few feet from the ground as they started retracting undercarriages.

Howie moved the biplane out towards the runway. Charlie felt a tap on his shoulder. He looked behind to see Howie making a universal gesture at him. Charlie got the message, searched down by his feet, found a full bottle and passed it to the old man. Howie grinned and gave a thumbs-up sign, spat the cork away and drained half the bottle. At least he acted like a daredevil pilot.

The plane moved forward.

Above the howling of the engine, he could just about hear Howie whooping. Charlie joined in as the Spruce Goose left the ground. He stopped as it hit the ground again.

"Damn the torpedoes!" he yelled, for want of anything more appropriate or exuberant, as the plane left the ground decisively and the grey scar of the runway became highlighted against the green of Baxter Field below.

At the end of the runway, he could see three stick figures waving. Patsy and Peggy Sue had been joined by a third person, whose skull was swathed in greying bandage and whose left arm was stiff.

Charlie pulled the helmet's goggles down and fixed them over his glasses, feeling like Audie Murphy being catapulted off the aircraft carrier *Eugene Debs* to do battle with the Japanese in *Twelve O'Clock High*.

Ahead, he could see the Helldivers against the clouds. The planes circled the field at 500 feet, pulling a wide lazy arc as they went in for the first stunt.

Patton's ship got in there impatiently. Charlie recognized it as Patton's because he could just make out the yellow blur of the names of the Japanese and German cities the General was supposed to have bombed painted next to the cockpit. It executed three loops in succession without stalling. Charlie could imagine the people down below applauding.

Patton's Helldiver made height to circle out of the way as Lindbergh's plane swooped down to repeat the trick. Again, Charlie felt Howie tapping his shoulder. He looked back to see a ferocious leer on the old man's face. "Strapped in, boy?" shouted Howie. Charlie checked, and pulled the buckles tighter.

Lindbergh put his plane into an elegant descending arc, ready to loop a few loops. Charlie felt himself being pushed backwards in his seat as the Spruce Goose gathered speed and headed into a collision course for Lindbergh's port side.

Charlie tensed. The Helldiver seemed less than a hundred yards off. He could make out Morrison's face at the back of the cockpit, looking at them in what he was sure was horror. The Curtiss started pulling up at the beginning of its first loop. Something howled in Charlie's ear as they passed the plane. It was right above them. Then the world turned upside-down and the Helldiver was below them and the harness was straining on his shoulders.

The world turned again, and again, and again, and again.

Howie had flown his first loop through Lindbergh's first loop, and had gone on to execute four more loops himself.

Charlie was glad he'd been to the privy that morning.

The H-1 turned and swooped low towards Baxter Field. As it overflew the crowd at 80 feet, Howie put her through four victory rolls. As far as he was concerned, he had just won the first contest with flying colours.

At the side of the airfield, parallel to the runway, were a pair of large grain-silos. The Roseville Wheat Collective stored their produce there. Each was 150 feet tall and they were 50 feet apart. These were to be the site of the next stunt.

The three aircraft stacked, 200 feet apart, in a circle above the silos. The Spruce Goose was at the top, and Howie made a point of keeping directly above Lindbergh. Charlie fought the slipstream to lean over the side and make rude gestures at Morrison.

The first to try flying between the silos was Patton. The plane took a long run in at the obstacles, but at the last moment, Old Guts and Glory's nerve must have gone, or he must have misjudged for, a good distance from them, the plane banked sharply to the right and upwards, rising in height to rejoin the stack for another go.

Charlie felt sure he could hear Howie jeering.

Next was Lindbergh. He broke out of the stack, curving upwards and turning gracefully half a mile away before beginning his run.

Below them, Lindbergh was down to 50 feet, skimming the flat Kansas countryside. Charlie knew that for a man experienced in flying off the pointy end of an aircraft carrier – and more difficult, landing on it again – this was no challenge at all.

He didn't hear the sound of Lindbergh's wingtip glancing off the side of one of the silos. Nor did he expect to be able to hear the sound of the grain pouring out of the corrugated iron tower like water. But he saw it, and he didn't believe it. He turned to Howie.

"Did that on purpose!" Howie mouthed.

Lindbergh's Curtiss wasn't seriously damaged. It had lost or dented perhaps two inches of wingtip, but he pulled up over Baxter Field, gained more height over Fort Baxter before curving round and coming in to land. Lindbergh had deliberately put himself out of the race.

"Cluck cluck," Charlie shouted. "There goes the Lone Chicken."

Now Howie broke the Spruce Goose out of its circling

pattern and flew off over the fields before turning to face the silos.

Slowly, Howie let the plane lose height until Charlie felt as though he could put his hand out of his cockpit and touch the corn-stubble below. Howie was shouting.

"Hold on...tight..."

The twin towers of the silos loomed up ahead. Charlie tensed.

Suddenly, the world was thrown out of perspective again. The harnesses were cutting into his shoulders. His legs were trying to leave the floor and his centre of gravity was moving into his chest. The silos were still dead ahead. But they were upside down. The ground seemed only inches from the top of his head.

Charlie closed his eyes.

He could hear grains of corn, still spilling from the gash that Lindbergh's wing had made in the tower, spattering off the underside of the lower wing as they swooped through.

Howie pulled her up a little, gaining enough height to avoid crashing into Baxter Field's rudimentary control tower, and to do a few more victory rolls to acknowledge the admiration of the crowd, however muted it might be. Charlie wondered how this looked from the ground.

They ran up to 400 feet and watched Patton go in for his second run. This time, he didn't refuse the jump, but went straight at the silos. From where he was, looking down from above, however, Charlie couldn't be sure if Patton had actually flown between them. He may have just gone over the top of them. One thing was for sure: the steel-spined hero had not flown nearly as low between the things as he and Howie had just done.

It was time for the dive bombing contest.

A large cross of sheets and sacking, each axis fifty feet long, had been weighted down with stones on the grass to one side of the airfield. This was the target. The contestants simply had to drop their two bombs as close to the centre as possible. Patton's Helldiver would be dropping its load from racks under the fuselage. The Spruce Goose's bombs would be dropped by Charlie. This was his main task as co-pilot. He'd done much the same from gliders.

The Helldivers were equipped with the very latest bombsight, and bombing was something the RFS demonstrated every time it visited somewhere. It was something Charlie expected Patton's bombardier, Major McCarthy, to be quite good at. Presumably he didn't call himself "Bomber Joe" for nothing.

Charlie had an advantage that, as far as he was concerned, evened things up. He would be coming in over the target slower and lower. Besides, a fifty-foot cross was a trickier target than Berlin.

Patton's ship went down first, dropping its practise bomb to spread a shock of blue dye about the grass a good fifteen feet too soon.

Charlie pulled the first of his bombs from the cockpit locker and sat it in his lap. The plane lowered itself in over the target, almost as leisurely as a hen sitting herself down on a clutch of eggs, then swooped, accelerating sharply.

Charlie leaned over the side, trying to get the right feel of the wind and slipstream, as he'd been taught

at bombing classes at summer camp, and let go. The trick was to judge the exact speed of the plane, then calculate from the altitude just how soon before the plane was directly over the target to drop the bomb so it would follow a slanted trajectory towards the crux of the cross.

Howie pulled the plane gently upwards, riding parallel with the runway off to their left. Charlie strained backwards to see the effects of his work. There was a very satisfying splatter of red dye almost bang in the middle of the target.

On the edge of the field, he noticed three figures lounging in the grass by an old Haynes Roadster, passing a bottle between them. Melvin Yandell and his cronies. He was sorely tempted to drop his second bomb on them, but it wouldn't have been in keeping with the spirit of the contest.

They ambled about the sky, Howie finishing off the contents of his bottle as they watched Patton go in for his second bomb run.

This time, Bomber Joe found his target, coming in fast at 100 feet and sloshing his blue paint right in the middle of the huge cross on the ground. It was an impressive achievement, but, Charlie reflected, as much a tribute to good old Socialist know-how and repeated practice than any virtue on McCarthy's part.

The General's plane pulled up and away and it was Charlie's turn again. He was worried that Howie would try and outdo Patton by trying more fancy aerobatics, but he just took her in steady as before.

Charlie dropped his bomb, and looked down and back to find it, too, had hit the target slap in the middle. He grinned back at Howie. Howie winked and handed him the bottle he had just emptied. Charlie was confused to see that the bottle was nearly full again, with a pale yellow liquid.

Howie pointed to Melvin's car and put his free thumb up, and Charlie caught on. Which was just as well, because he had been on the point of taking a celebratory drink. They had, after all, just won the contest.

Instead of taking the plane up to gain height, circle round and land, Howie kept her low as they swooped in over Melvin, Philly and Chick. Charlie, drawing on all his bombing expertise, emptied the bottle of urine over the choking thugs.

Howie banked to one side and Charlie noted with satisfaction that the hoods were shaking fists and brushing down their expensive clothes.

He turned back to Howie to give him the thumbs-up, but he noticed the huge blue shape of a Curtiss Helldiver swooping down from above, passing overhead at what must have been 300 mph.

The Spruce Goose shook and buffeted violently in the larger aircraft's slipstream. In the back of the Helldiver's long glazed cockpit he could see McCarthy drawing a bead on them with a hand-held tommy gun.

The tailgun quivered and small flames issued from its muzzle.

Charlie turned to Howie.

"Are those blanks?"

Howie pointed to the lower right hand wing. It was pockmarked with half a dozen holes, each surrounded by shreds of ripped canvas flapping in the wind like torn paper.

In the distance, the Helldiver was turning again for

another run at them. Charlie knew that Curtiss Helldivers had six powerful wing-mounted 20 mm cannon. He hoped that they wouldn't be loaded since the plane was simply on a courtesy visit. If they were primed, he and Howie were finished. Using them against an old biplane would be like killing a butterfly with both barrels of a 16-gauge.

Howie turned the H-1 on a dime, keeping her low and running across Baxter Field. Keeping her low would stop Patton from getting in underneath them where they were even more vulnerable. And perhaps Old Guts and Glory would be less willing to murder his opponents in full view of the people of Roseville. At the least, it would show them the bastard was a sore loser.

Even in the distance, and even over the rhythmic clatter of the Spruce Goose's engine, they could hear the Helldiver humming, the noise growing to a guttural roar as it came at them from behind.

Once again, the fragile biplane shook as the navy fighter overflew them, slightly to the left. There was no damage done. Clearly, Patton and McCarthy would be wishing their wing guns were loaded.

Once again Charlie could see McCarthy squinting down the sights of the tailgun. It occurred to him that in combat, the Curtiss's rear-mounted weapon was normally a heavy-calibre machine gun. It was luck of a kind, though McCarthy's toy could kill them just as effectively if he got a bead on his target.

McCarthy's gun stuttered. Howie broke left to throw his aim.

It worked. By the time he realized what was going on, McCarthy was too far away to get an accurate shot. But it hadn't stopped him from trying anyway, and in following through, he had made the most dumb, elementary mistake imaginable.

If Charlie needed any more proof that the war record of Major Joseph McCarthy, at least, was somewhat exaggerated, here it was. He had just shot through his own tail.

He realized his mistake before it was too late. The Helldiver's huge sail-like tailplane was a little the worse for wear, but still intact. But McCarthy kept firing, even though the distance between the two planes was growing. Howie threw the H-1 all over the sky to evade fire.

They were overflying the edge of Baxter Field again, just where Charlie had earlier seen Peggy Sue, Patsy and Jack, and the Helldiver was still firing uselessly at them. Major McCarthy must be madder than hell, Charlie reflected, to be using up his ammunition in this way.

Howie turned the plane again, still keeping low, as the much faster naval fighter disappeared into the distance. He brought the Spruce Goose over Baxter Field yet again, looping three loops and coming out into three victory rolls to prove to everyone that he and Charlie weren't scared.

Being thrown about the air like this was annoying Charlie a little. He was searching his brain for the vital statistics on Curtiss Helldivers, the rate of turn, rate of climb, stalling speed...

The Helldiver was coming up behind them again.

Once again, it took up position ahead of them to give McCarthy a shot at them. Once again, Bomber Joe took aim.

Nothing happened.

McCarthy's gun had either jammed or run out of ammunition. It wasn't completely impossible, given the rate at which he had been firing, that the barrel had burned out.

The Helldiver swooped on into the wide blue yonder.

It was all over. Charlie could add another 45 minutes to his flying time.

Howie tapped him on the shoulder again, signalling for another bottle. Charlie leaned forwards and found one wedged at the back of the rudder bar.

"You...take...er...in," yelled Howie, grabbing the bottle.

For a moment Charlie panicked. His 123¼ flying hours barely qualified him for a single-handed landing.

The Spruce Goose jinked lazily across open fields as Charlie realized that, without a bottle of rotgut jammed in front of it, the rudder bar in the front cockpit was operational and that his feet were on it.

For the first time, he grabbed the stick. Howie, singing in the back, had clearly decided to call it a day.

For all that she looked like a stringbag, the H-1 was light to the touch and very responsive. Charlie jerked her up and to the left and passed in a wide semicircle around the perimeter of Baxter Field to line her up on the runway.

There was no sign of the Curtiss Helldiver that had been trying to kill them. But down below, he noticed a growing knot of people away from the main area. An olive green army ambulance, painted at the top and sides with red crosses on white backgrounds, was bumping across the field towards the group. There must have been some kind of accident.

Two minutes later, Charlie had the Spruce Goose pointing down the main runway. He took a deep breath and brought her in, easing down the throttle, hoping that Peggy Sue's rabbit's foot still had enough luck left in it.

It was a perfect landing. Tyres touched the tarmac and stayed there.

Suddenly, Charlie became aware that his shirt and trousers were soaking wet. He had shed more sweat in less than an hour than Porky Rook did in a year's worth of sexual incontinence lectures.

"Fuckin'-A-OK, Charlie boy," slurred Howie from the back. "Yer a born flier. Shit, I couldn't do a landing smooth as that, drunk or sober!"

Charlie taxied her to the area in front of the crowded grandstand before shutting off the engine.

Silence. Perfect silence.

He and Howie clambered out of the plane, pulling off gloves, goggles, helmets and jackets.

It was only then he realized that everyone was clapping and cheering.

Over the public address system someone was saying "ladies and gentlemen, comrades, I give you the heroes of the hour. That old barnstormer certainly showed the RFS a thing or two. The pilot of the H-1, as I was telling you, has a very distinguished war-record. I should know because I was Howie's squadron commander when we were escorting bombers over Germany and..."

With a start, Charlie realized the voice belonged to Lieutenant Lafayette R. Hubbard.

"Howie," he whispered urgently to his companion, "what's going on? Surely Patton isn't going to approve of this?"

"Beats me, Charlie."

"And, comrades, I'm glad to tell you I've just had word from the doctor. Apparently the stray bullet that young Patsy caught in the leg only gave her a scratch. She's going to be fine ladies and gentlemen, just fine... You know, all this excitement we've had here this morning reminds me of the time I was flying Dauntlesses at the Battle of Midway. We were flying off the aircraft carrier *Matewan* and Admiral Nimitz came up to me and said..."

"Hubbard was what you'd call a pathological liar, I guess. Totally incapable of telling the truth. But he wasn't dumb. He'd seen that Patton had flipped, and after Lindbergh and Morrison deliberately put themselves out of the running, the three of them had gotten together on the ground and decided to double-cross him and McCarthy. They all hated McCarthy anyway, for being stone-crazy. And they'd just made several big mistakes.

"When McCarthy made that last run at us, squirting off all that ammo like it was water, he was firing downwards. And one of his stray shells caught Patsy. Just a scratch. If she'd caught it full, she'd have lost a leg. So when word got to Hubbard and Morrison and Lindbergh that Patton's irresponsible behaviour had gotten someone hurt, it was an absolute godsend to them. They no longer had any qualms about rattling out on their buddies. So while we were in mortal danger up in the sky, Hubbard was giving a running commentary. Realizing the crowd's sympathies would be with the underdogs – me and Howie – he played us up as socialist good guys, and stabbed Old Guts and Glory and Bomber Joe in the back.

"When they landed a few minutes later, everyone was jeering them, and Patsy's father – Peggy Sue's father – could walk up to McCarthy and punch him on the nose for shelling his daughter without any fear of reprisal. Way I heard it, Patton and McCarthy ended up drilling for oil in Alaska, a pretty rough punishment in those days. And Lindbergh, Morrison and Hubbard carried on with the RFS as though nothing had happened. You can't really say everyone got what they deserved, but it was a kind of justice I guess.

"And they all lived happily ever after. Patsy got better a lot quicker than Jack did. Jack and Howie hung around Roseville a couple of days before disappearing over the very flat horizon of Kansas. After nearly getting killed, and after receiving the most almighty whopping for pulling such a stupid stunt, I gradually lost interest in planes. As a matter of fact, I sort of developed a phobia about them. I sometimes have dreams about how near to getting killed I was when McCarthy opened fire, and I've been travelling on the ground ever since. It was my sixteenth birthday a few days later. Same day that Jack and Howie flew off, I recall. My parents traded Jack a couple of home-grown squashes for his guitar, and, for my birthday, gave it to me. I wasn't too sure about the thing at first, but over the months I found myself fooling around with it more, and before I knew where I was I knew I'd found my heartbeat..."

"Also, I got the girl, of course. At least for a year or

two, but in the end, Peggy Sue got married to someone else. It could have been worse, I suppose. It could have been Melvin Yandell. He went to Washington a few years later and became one of the many people who make a good living doing nothing in particular down somewhere along the lines where the Party mixed with the Mafia. Shortly after Vonnegut came to power and he turned the FBI against organized crime, Yandell was one of the patsies thrown to the wolves by the wiseguys. No, Peggy Sue, I'm afraid, has the lousy taste to call herself Mrs Pete Horowitz these days. Captain Porky Rook kept at the Pioneers until he was found doing something disgraceful with Melvin Yandell's little brother Fat Billy, and wound up in a re-education centre for the sexually incontinent out in Death Valley. Patsy took off one day a few months later, to get out of going to a dance with Chick Willis, and never came back. She was smart, so I reckon she found something somewhere. Osgood Yandell had a heart attack from overeating, and Colonel Hall was given the Order of Debs in 1961 for lifelong service to the USSA.

"Jack and Howie? They carried on their business for a while, I think. Jack eventually quit to write books. Howie? Who knows? I like to think he's still out there somewhere. Those guys were legends. They flew all over the country at a time when most folks never expected to go beyond ten or twenty miles outside their home-town in a lifetime. Me, I've been all over the place, and I always used to make a point of asking folks if Jack and Howie had been through back in the '40s or early '50s. And a lot of the time they had, putting on a show, spraying crops, getting drunk, falling foul of the Party or the local law. They didn't take any crap from anyone at a time when everyone had to take a lot of crap. And that's good enough for me..."

The crowd at Texas Jack's had been getting impatient with the second-rate band that had been grinding its way through three-chord covers all afternoon. So when they finished slaughtering Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USSA," they got no encouragement at all to continue. They seemed to take it in good spirits. The place was full now, and Lowe knew people had been sneaking looks at him, envying his temporary monopoly on C.H. Holley, impatient for the musician to get on stage. The Crickets, Holley's backing band, were in the club already, setting up. This gig hadn't been announced, but everybody knew about it. Over the years, a finely-tuned grapevine had been cultivated all over America.

"Guess I have to go to work," said Holley, strumming his fingers on his chest.

"One last question. Now that the New Deal is here ... to stay, by the look of it ... now that the old dictatorships are gone, what is the role of C.H. Holley and all the other dissenter musos?"

"I'm not a politician. I can't tell you what to do about five-year-plans, or budget defecits, or import control. Let folks have a decent standard of living, and let them do whatever's right for them as long as nobody else gets hurt or pushed around. That's all the politics I need. That's enough isn't it? And I think that's where Vonnegut and the other New Dealers are coming from, too, and that suits me fine. But you got

to remember, what I do is make music. If I see injustice or exploitation or graft, I get an urge to write songs about that, but I also do songs about love and roller-coasters and sunny summer mornings. It's an imperfect world, Mr Lowe, and I don't think even a great man like First Secretary Vonnegut is going to make it all turn out right. In your own country, you've been living under the heel of that awful Thatcher woman for as long as I can remember. I listen to the radio and read the papers, and they report that she and the other European leaders are running around saying that capitalism has won the day, and that America is soon going to be a free enterprise Garden of Eden filled with opportunities for European businessmen... That's horsecrap, Mr Lowe, and you can tell your readers I said so. Americans don't want Thatcher's economic pitbull scraps. You have people sleeping in cardboard boxes in London, begging for money and food on the streets. We don't want that. We had two revolutions to get rid of that. Three, if you count the New Deal. No, this is something different."

C.H. Holley shook Lowe's hand, and got up onto the stage. He strapped his guitar on, and, without tuning up, hit a chord. He was perfectly in tune, calling up the music like an old friend. He played some of the old songs, and a lot of the new ones. Everything Lowe had heard about him was true.

"Heart-beattt," Holley sang, "why do you miss..."

ReCONnaissance

The Park Hotel, Cardiff, 22nd to 24th February 1991

New Works and New Ideas in SF

Reconnaissance is a convention about what's new in SF. We have no single guest, but a number of Special Participants, who will take part in the programme and air the views of the new creators in SF. Some of our Special Participants will be new to you, some will be established authors, but all will be looking forward to the future of SF.

Reconnaissance has, as a result, been put together in a different way to many other conventions. We started with a name, which led to the theme of New Works and New Ideas in SF. The range of programme items and the programme structure then followed logically from this, allowing the Special Participants to be chosen to fit in with the overall programme. Thus, we have kept to our theme throughout (with a few inevitable excursions into the silly items that no con should do without).

If you are interested in participating in Reconnaissance, please talk to us. Though we are for at least, were what we started. Reconnaissance is a group of like-minded new to convention running, and have fewer preconceptions about what we are doing, we cannot be expected to encompass the range of opinions and specialisms that make up the world of SF. We need your help, and we would be nothing without the co-operation of the new creators in SF, so tell us what we can do for you and you can do for us.

Enough about our high-flown theories, and back to basics: the convention will be held over the weekend of the 22nd to 24th February 1991 at the Park Hotel in Cardiff. The Park is a four star hotel just one minute out of the main-line station by local train (or 10 minutes walk from main-line station) and on one of Cardiff's main pedestrian shopping streets.

To register for the convention please send your membership fee (currently £18 attending, £10 supporting, but please note that these rates may change after 12 November 90) to the address below. When you join, you will receive the first three copies of *Dispatches* which includes a piece by John Clute on the Science Fiction Foundation (our convention charity), an article by Colin Greenland investigating the new writers and chasing the spectre of Technophobia, the newest 'New Wave', and an article by Frances Bonner on 'TV and Film SF in the Post-Mundane World'.

If you have any views on the future of your genre, or would like to hear more, come and talk to us.

To join, please copy the form below and return it to:

Reconnaissance, 5 St. Andrews Road, Carrington, Salford M6 2DY.

Current Special Participants: Gill Alderman, Lionel Fanthorpe, Dave Langford, Mary Gentle, Colin Greenland, John Gribbin, Lorna Mitchell, Terry Pratchett, David Pringle, Alex Stewart, Charles Stross, Dean Wayland

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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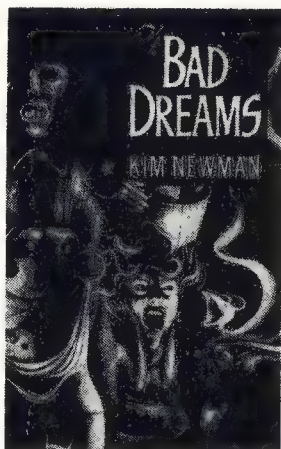
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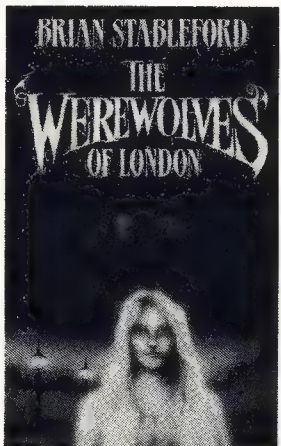
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"She was delicious. He stroked her side, his nails turned to bony scalpels. He opened her at the hip, and scraped the bone.

He fed off her for hours, until her heart burst."

BAD DREAMS by Kim Newman. Published on 24 September, £13.95



"The surface of Hell is in perpetual turmoil; molten magma cools to form a jet black crust... Upon this surface a gargantuan Satan is stretched supinely, pinned by seven enormous nails which are driven through his ankles and knees, his navel, wrist and throat; only his right arm is free to reach up into the blazing sky, from which a rain of blood perpetually falls."

London, 1872. Satan's armies prepare for battle.

THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON by Brian Stableford. Published on 23 July, £14.95.

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Ray Bradbury

Interview by Stan Nicholls

Ray Bradbury's stories have influenced generations of fans, and other writers, and his name is synonymous with the genre to millions of general readers. But he now thinks the science-fiction label inappropriate. "It doesn't work, because I'm an ideas person," he says, "I'll write about anything that provokes my curiosity."

His new novel, *A Graveyard for Lunatics* – only his second since 1963 – underlines the point. It is a mystery set in 1950s Hollywood, although it does have some very offbeat aspects. These days, Bradbury says, the unifying element in his work is simply an ability to have fun producing it. "People often ask if I take vacations and I say I don't have to because I've never worked a day in my life. If I worked hard the stories would be no good. *A Graveyard for Lunatics* wrote itself. The revisions take a little time, but the initial work has to be joyful and relaxing and fun. Those are the operative words."

Born in Illinois in 1920, Bradbury moved with his parents to Los Angeles when he was fourteen, where he pursued his ambition to write by mixing with professionals. "All the science-fiction writers became my teachers and friends," he recalls.

"I joined the Science Fantasy Society in LA, which met at Cookson's Cafeteria every Thursday. We were all poor, and Mr Clinton, who owned the restaurant, said that if you wanted to eat free you could. So on the way out you just told them you couldn't afford to buy the dinner. It was hard for me to do of course, but I was very poor, and on occasion I took advantage of that."

"I joined that group when I was in high school, and Henry Kuttner was part of it." Kuttner became a sort of mentor. "I was seventeen, he was probably twenty, but a wise man for his age. Along the way he was helping me, and submitting stories on my behalf to *Astounding*, although he was never able to sell one for me. Parts of some of my stories were written by Kuttner. The last two hundred words of 'The Candle' are his. He wrote them to show me how to finish the story, and I said, 'I can't do any better than this, can I keep your ending?' He said, 'Keep it.'

So his ending's on that story. It's not a very good story, but it was a beginning; my first story in *Weird Tales*.

"Heinlein came into the group two years later, then Edmond Hamilton, and Leigh Brackett. I used to meet Brackett every Sunday at Muscle Beach in Santa Monica, and she would read my dreadful short stories, and I'd read her beautiful ones from *Planet Stories*. She wrote the opening of another story for me, 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow.' I had that sort of attention from all these wonderful writers, and I'm very grateful for their inspiration."

Over the years he developed an instinctive approach to writing, relying on the spontaneity of his subconscious, and believes planning out a story in advance constricts his creativity. "You stop yourself from thinking in new directions," he explains. "You can't outline your life. You came to me today asking questions. You don't know what I'm going to say. I don't know what you're going to ask. So we have a chance to have a creative relationship, and the possibility of some surprises. Outlining is dangerous. I always describe a plot of a book as the footprints left in the snow after someone's run by. You must not put those footprints ahead of the person."

"When I write a poem, especially, and it isn't right, I put it away for a while and then sit down and run it through the typewriter. All of a sudden in the middle of a line my subconscious says, 'Not that word, this one.' That is not thinking, it's a creative explosion. It's got to be intuitive."

"It took me ten years to understand this. Then one day I remembered a girl on the beach with me when I was seven or eight years old. She went in the water and didn't come out. God, what a mystery that was. How strange. They told me she was never coming out, and they never found her. That haunted me. What is this thing called death they're talking about? I'd seen my grandfather dead, I'd seen my sister dead, and I'd seen two other deaths, one at the age of five and another at the age of seven. But I guess that disappearance was in my subconscious all those years, and when I was twenty-two I remembered it, and began to

write a short story about that particular day. Two hours later I finished this twelve-page story, 'The Lake,' and I was in tears. I knew I'd written my first really good story. It's still around, it's still being published, and I put it on my TV series two years ago. But from that time on I have just sat down and extrapolated. I do word associations, memory associations, and allow my subconscious to take over."

"I read novels by young friends of mine, and it's description where they go wrong. Someone comes in a room, they sit down, they take a cup of coffee, they turn on the radio, they look out the window. I say, 'Wait a minute. Where's the author? Tell me what he feels when he looks out the window. Because that's you. Tell me about yourself, and pretend it's the character.' My books are full of people explaining themselves."

He has always tried to provide, in his novels, short stories and plays, what he calls "great moments of truth." "I ask myself, what is this character doing? Why are they doing it? What's their background? People love that, and actors love it because I write language plays. I was encouraged in this by Charles Laughton. I knew him thirty-five years ago when I wrote a stage version of *Fahrenheit 451* for him. But I was too young. I didn't know what I was doing, and I tried to follow my book, and you can't do that. You've got to get the essence of the book. I used to go to Laughton's house, and he would stand on his hearth and do lines from *Lear* for me – he was going to appear in it at Stratford – and scenes from *Hamlet* or *Othello*. He encouraged me to become a language playwright, because he knew I had the gift."

He feels the way he writes was verified when he met film director Federico Fellini. "I was in Italy twelve years ago, and got to know Fellini. At dinner one night I said, 'Federico, I hear that when you're making a film you don't look at the rushes.' He said, 'That's right.' I asked why, and he said, 'I want it to remain mysterious, I don't want to know what I'm doing. That provokes my subconscious to give me gifts. If I knew what I was doing it would stop the creative process.' That's exactly the way I work, and it was nice to talk to

someone like that and have it confirmed that intuition is the powerful factor."

He wants the story to be as much the unfolding of a mystery to him as it will be for the reader. "That makes it fun, and if I have fun, you have fun. I had more fun with *Graveyard for Lunatics* than any other book I've ever written. It was a joy. I lay in bed every morning, around seven o'clock, listening to my characters talk. Then at eight fifteen I'd jump up and run to trap them before they got away."

This is in that state between sleep and wakefulness, the twilight zone? "There you go! The twilight zone, yes. I call it 'The Theatre of Morning.' I wake up and begin to hear the voices. It's very peculiar. They began to speak fifteen or twenty years ago, and it's really terrific stuff. They begin to talk, and as soon as they do a new plot idea occurs, a metaphor of some kind."

In the mid-1950s, having already achieved a considerable literary reputation, he gained a new audience when the EC Comics company adapted a number of his stories. Not that they initially asked his permission. "That was one of those cases where someone stole from me and I caught them at it. They lifted 'Mars is Heaven' from *The Martian Chronicles*. It was word for word. What to do? I wrote a letter to Bill Gaines at EC and said, 'Congratulations on the brilliant adaptation of my story in the current issue. It's beautifully drawn, wonderfully adapted. I'm very, very happy. Incidentally, in your busy life you forgot to send me a fee.' The next week a cheque arrived. I wrote back and said, 'You know, a lot of people are stealing my stories these days—not you, of course—so why don't you adapt them, give me credit, and pay me a certain amount?' That's how my affiliation grew with them, and it protected me against all the other comic adaptors."

A similar thing happened in 1953 when one of his stories was used as the basis for the film *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. "The producers asked me to read the screenplay and tell them what I thought of it. I said, 'Gee, this is just like a story of mine in *The Saturday Evening Post* two years ago.' Their faces changed colour and their jaws dropped. We didn't say any more than that, but the next day a telegram arrived asking to buy the rights to the story." The special effects on *Beast* were undertaken by his old friend Ray Harryhausen.

That film, his work on *It Came From Outer Space* the same year, and the later adaptation of *Moby Dick*, allowed Bradbury access to a medium that had always fascinated him. "The Hunchback of Notre Dame was the first film I remember seeing, when I was three. I saw *Lost World* when I was five and

Phantom of the Opera when I was six. I saw all the Douglas Fairbanks films—because my middle name was Douglas—and all Lon Chaney's. They were simply amazing, and I still love to look at them, even though they are quite primitive in many ways. You got pure metaphor there.

"When they make the later versions they often leave out some of these metaphors. They destroyed the core when they remade *King Kong*, because it was supposed to be Beauty and the Beast. Well, the girl is not beauty, she's a whore. She's got to be pure. The beast has to fall in love with purity, not impurity. I retitled the new version 'The Turkey That Attacked New York,' and Mr De Laurentis wasn't very happy with my comment.

"I saw *Arsenic and Old Lace* on the stage recently. One of the funniest things in the original play was when, in a totally dark room, the people get a body out of a sideboard and carry it down to the basement. Half way down they trip and fall with the body. You just hear it, and it's hilarious. They left that out of the new version. What's wrong with these people to miss one of the great points? It's this sort of thing quite often that's missing in modern horror films, and they substitute for it too much blood, which makes me very nervous. They should learn from Val Lewton and his great films; you know, *The Cat People*, *Isle of the Dead*. And films like Robert Wise's *The Haunting* [1963, from Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*] which I think is the greatest horror movie ever made. My wife won't look at it, it scares her too much. But you don't see a thing, it's all sound. It's a radio show really."

He offered to write two versions of the screenplay for Universal when they made *It Came From Outer Space*. "They had an idea they wanted me to do, and I said, 'That's not very good, but I'll do it. On the other hand, while I do that I'll do a second version, and you can read them both. At which point, if you choose the wrong one, I'll leave.' They said, 'What kind of rules are those?' Anyway, two weeks later I turned in I don't know how many pages on each one, and they were sensible enough to choose mine. But then they took me off and didn't want me to do the screenplay because I wasn't a screenwriter. They gave it to someone else. He got the screen credit and I got the story credit. What the hell, there's enough room for everyone, and the movie turned out very nicely."

The screen adaptations of his own stories have not always been successful. What went wrong with *The Illustrated Man* for example? "Well, they never talked to me. The screenplay was written by a real-estate man from New Jersey. It really was. I guess he's back there now selling real estate. He never

read my book. Because if he'd read it, he would have followed the storyline. It was a terrible disappointment.

"There was a wrap party for *The Illustrated Man*. Rod Steiger and the director got up and introduced everyone, praised everyone—the cinematographer, the editor, the art director, the composer—and I was never mentioned. But what could I do? Stand up and protest? When the whole thing was over they all went off to separate parties and I wasn't invited."

He was unhappy with the television version of *The Martian Chronicles* too. "The *Martian Chronicles* fits a joke I heard years ago—'A Wagnerian opera starts at eight o'clock. At eight fifteen you look at your watch and three hours have gone by.' It was the director, Michael Anderson. His pace was all off. I saw a couple other of his films right after that, with Michael Caine and Orson Welles, and he managed to make them boring.

"Now I'm doing over sections of *Martian Chronicles* on my own series, and doing them right. I'm writing the scripts and I'm picking the directors. I've just done 'Mars is Heaven,' and it's turned out very well. I've got Robert Culp doing 'The Long Years,' and I've got David Carradine doing another one of the stories. I was surprised when I went to NBC six months ago, and asked them to let me have the rights to the *Chronicles* back, and they said yes. Maybe they felt guilty." His show has been running on the USA Cable network since 1985.

But he was pleased with François Truffaut's adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*. "It has a lot of missing elements, but I liked it very much, and I love the last scene. It began to snow when they were shooting that, and they decided to stay out in it, which was very wise of them. It made it very haunting, and the recitations of the book people, along with the music of Bernard Herrman, made it one of the best last reels in the history of movies."

The film of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* captured an authentic Bradbury atmosphere, but the production was fraught with difficulties. "I wound up fighting with my director all the time," he says. "Jack Clayton completely ruined the film to begin with, and he brought in John Mortimer to rewrite my screenplay without telling me. And Clayton was an old friend of mine, we'd seen twenty-five years of friendship. On the first day of shooting he said, 'I have something to tell you. I've rewritten your script.' I said, 'Oh gee, thanks a lot. Why didn't you call me?' He said, 'I thought you were busy.' So he hired John Mortimer, who's not a fantasy writer. He's an excellent adaptor—*Brideshead* is I think a fine job and very evocative—but that's totally different to doing

Something Wicked. A lot of people don't understand fantasy and how you put it together to make it work.

"What happened was that Clayton gave me a copy of the script and said if I found something wrong to tell him. I read it and came back the next day with a list of seven or eight things I felt were wrong in the first twenty pages. He read the list and threw it at me, saying, 'This is completely unacceptable.' I knew that was the end of the friendship. That he would do that to me, and say that to me, after twenty-five years. So the film began and he wouldn't talk to me. I went to his secretary, Jeannie Simms, who was John Huston's secretary, and I've known her forever, and I said, 'Hey, what's wrong? He's not talking to me. This is ridiculous, I want to have a happy relationship here.' She said he was very upset I didn't like the new script, and that I hadn't written a fan letter to John Mortimer and thanked him. I said, 'Give me his address. I'll write a lie.' I wrote a letter – 'Dear Mr Mortimer, thank you for the brilliant script and the changes you've made, etc., etc.' – and took it to Jack Clayton and asked him to mail it to Mr Mortimer for me. After that he began to talk to me again. Based on a lie. I hated writing that letter, but I wanted to talk to my director."

The film went on, with Bradbury trying to warn Clayton and the studio that it wasn't going to work. "We had a preview, and when it was over there was dead silence. We all went home depressed. Three days later the phone rang. It was the head of the studio, Ron Miller, asking me to come in. I went to his office and he said, 'I hope you're not going to say I told you so?' I said, 'No. That's not my business. My business is to help you re-do the film.' So they rebuilt the sets, re-hired the actors, and spent five million dollars correcting most of the things that were wrong. I worked with the editor re-editing the last reel of the film, because there was a lot of inadvertent humour in it, and an over-abundance of visual information. If you keep overloading people's circuits they'll finally laugh at you.

"The studio didn't know how to cure that last reel, and were ready to fire the film editor. I went to Miller again, and asked how much it cost for an editor for one week, then offered to pay for it. I thought we were that close to making a good film. They backed off and paid for an extra week. We put it together and it worked. I'm very proud of that. I'd never edited before. The final film is quite nice, and some of the moments are terrific."

A Graveyard For Lunatics is full of lightly disguised real people; some, like Ray Harryhausen, close friends of the author. This process began with Bradbury's first murder



Photo of Ray Bradbury by Tom Victor

mystery, *Death is a Lonely Business*, published in 1985. "All of a sudden all these people I knew in the past came up to me [in his imagination] and said, 'Put me in.' So I put them in, and used their real names in many cases. Blind Henry was a blind man I knew in a tenement fifty years ago, and Fanny Floriana was a retired opera singer who weighed four hundred pounds."

Bradbury was inspired to write *Graveyard* when he saw a man with a badly disfigured face. "I was coming over to Europe on the ship six years ago. I was going to my stateroom, during the first five minutes of the voyage, and this man passed me. After he'd gone I broke into tears. I'd never seen a face quite like it, it looked terrible. That night at dinner I saw him seated with his wife and daughter, enjoying himself, laughing, drinking champagne. The gift of love had changed his face for him; and for them, obviously."

"I got to Paris, and that face haunted me. My wife was asleep every night at twelve o'clock, so I'd sit in the dark with my silent typewriter and just type without seeing what I was writing. In ten days I did somewhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty pages of this novel. I spent a year writing the first draft and never read it during that whole time. Because I wanted it to remain mysterious and provocative. At the end I had six hundred pages,

and I looked at it, and thought, 'I'll be damned, it's fascinating.' Then I began to revise and add things."

"Jesus Christ is a character. He was such fun, I could hardly wait to listen to him talk. I worked on *King of Kings*, I wrote a lot of unused material for the ending of that film, in the narration. Some of it went into the book. I wrote about the supper after the Last Supper, when Christ returned, and gave the fish to the disciples. That's all beautiful stuff, but they never used it in the film."

As the book was written, Harryhausen's character, Roy Holdstrom, assumed a major role. "Ray Harryhausen I wrote in for a small part at first, not knowing he would take over the novel and become one of the central characters. But I don't plan these things. You let that other side of you write it."

"Ray and I dreamt certain things when we were in high school and lived to see them accomplished. We both were madly in love with *King Kong* and always wanted to do something like that, and by God we did, plus. I've had an amazing life, and he's had an amazing life, and every time I lecture I talk about him, and the fact there are Harryhausen festivals all over the world now. He said to me recently, 'It's wonderful so many people think we're so important.' I said, 'You're damn right, boy, it's beautiful!'"

Why haven't they worked together more often? "We've discussed this, and decided it might have destroyed our friendship, because creativity is a weird business. I'll give you an example. I had lunch with Walt Disney twenty-five years ago. Disneyland was just being planned, and I was fascinated by the idea. I suggested I came in, and collaborate with him on Futureworld, because I'd love the challenge. He said, 'It's no use, Ray, we can't do that. You're a genius and I'm a genius and the second week we'd kill each other.' That's the nicest turn-down I ever had, and there's a lot of truth in it, because we were both very opinionated. When I get excited about an idea and someone gets in the way and spoils my fun I get a little grouchy. So it's maybe just as well that Ray and I remain in parallels, jogging along through life."

Graveyard For Lunatics is subtitled "Another Tale of Two Cities"; intended as a respectful nod toward his hero, Dickens. "I love him. In fact I wrote a story called 'Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby's is a Friend of Mine,' in which Charlie Dickens moves into my grandparents house when I was twelve years old, and I help him to write *A Tale of Two Cities*. He says, 'Pip, I hope you don't mind me calling you Pip?' And I said, 'No, sir.' And he says, 'Pip, take a novel. You got your number two pencil?' 'Yes, sir.' 'OK, I'm writing a story about Paris and London, can you help me with a title, Pip?' I say, 'Well, um, er, "A Tale..." 'Excellent, excellent!' 'A Tale of... Two Cities?' 'Oh! Wonderful, wonderful! Chapter one: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...' We spend the Summer writing the novel. At the end, I introduce him to Emily Dickinson, and they get married. It was a love song, my tribute to Dickens. It was made into a film on public television in America about ten years ago and they did a fine job on it."

Other favourites are Alexander Pope and Thomas Love Peacock. He also likes Agatha Christie, "But she's fairly boring most of the time, because she's rigid. I like the films better. They're fluid, the extraneous material is dropped away and her great sense of plotting is there, and a good sense of character."

"I love Shakespeare because he's not busy plotting all the time. He has Hamlet come to the front and say, 'I'm feeling kind of sad right now. You want to know why?' Or Richard III comes on and says, 'You have a villain before you and I'll tell you the reasons.' I like Raymond Chandler and his little asides about the characters and the weather and architecture. George Bernard Shaw is my super-favourite because of his essays about his plays. In some cases the essay is better than the play."

He regards all the different forms he works in as essentially the same creative process. "It's part of being in love with many things. With art history, plays, the history of essays, cinema and comic strips. Whatever you love is what you learn about, and these become your metaphors."

"I've done many religious poems, for instance, and I've written a cantata about the various configurations of Christ during the next billion years in space. If Christ exists here he's got to exist on other worlds, with different shapes and forms. The creation of the universe remains a mystery to us, and we are mysteries within it. That being true, with our development from the cave to here, we're still on our way to becoming human. We haven't made it yet."

"I wrote an essay about space travel for a big book that's coming out at Christmas. I describe our progress as a species in terms of us being carpenters in an invisible cathedral. We're building stairs into space."

"Somewhere on the Earth, a billion, two billion years ago, the first eye was developed. Primitive algae in a pond was mutated by solar radiation maybe. Space travel would not exist if the eye had never been invented. We wouldn't know space was there. This is miraculous. We forget to celebrate the eye. What if we couldn't see? You have your own religion as soon as you start to talk about the eye."

But he is not conventionally religious. "Was it Aristotle or Plato who said, 'I'm a citizen of the universe'? That's really it. It sounds pompous, but it's true. Christianity's too narrow, and so is any other religion. It's not big enough."

(Ray Bradbury's *A Graveyard for Lunatics* is published by Grafton, £13.99.)

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A Snapshot Album

David Langford

2 May

Photography is a vastly over-rated art. I remember thinking that in the first years of seeing the castle at the corner of each eye.

The sunlit scene was so packed with neat compositions, each ready to be clipped from context and expensively framed. Harlech Castle brooded conventionally and forever photogenically on its high rock, the hills behind it littered with ancient settlements which to the uninformed looked exactly like heaps of grey stone. If you liked ironies, there were invading sheep nibbling remorselessly round the castle walls, and bobble-hatted schoolkids fixed in poses of boredom on the battlements. Below, the flatland where a besieging army might once have massed and lit its fires was dotted with paunchy golfers.

When the obvious began to pall, I could pick out abstract patterns incrutable as the constellations: the curl of yellow-striped caterpillars on one tall weed, or jackdaws strung along phone lines like a frozen message in morse. Infuriating not to be able to flick my eyes left or right, and take a proper look. Instead I had only the dimmest sense that somewhere north, in a direction pointed to by my left ear, were the much-postcarded mountains of Snowdonia.

Of course, in the end, everything palls, even the very small and shapely blonde whose rear elevation I could admire a little way up the road, caught inelegantly in mid-stride. (Eventually I came to think it almost constituted an introduction, having spent all that timeless time peering sidelong at her bum.) It wouldn't have made much ultimate difference if the focal point, along the tunnel of where I happened actually to be looking, had held anything of more interest than parched roadside grass decorated with a shiny bunch of rabbit-droppings.

Perhaps I'm doing the photographers an injustice, and perhaps it's no easier to coax the worthy details from a scene than to spot the statue hidden in the marble. I had that thought too as the years went by. I lost count of how many times I had it before my afternoon lurched back into motion.

The light changed and the landscape reshuffled itself minutely. Momentum returned: my foot came down on the beach road, the gull that had been nailed to the sky regained its gracefulness in a dipping seaward curve. A second later, having spent too long away, I fell over.

3 May

Dr Gruffydd is a peculiarly irritating man...one of those irremediably unlocal people who work at being

Welsher than the Welsh. (If he'd been born Smith and not Griffith, he'd now call himself Smydd. Or Smwdd.) Mid-forties, I suppose, with an unstinting beard. Receding gums give him a horrid peggy smile. He always knows better.

"Clearly a sort of illusory fugue state," he said, knowing better. "You should have told me the first time. Of course I'm not a psychiatrist, but, considering your position..."

The tone conveyed that nevertheless he happened to know more about the subject than all but two or at most three other people in Wales. He let the sentence dangle, and waited.

"I suppose it is dreadfully obvious in a pop-psychology way," I said quickly. "Maybe an expert would see a bit more in it." How dare he put his tobacco-stained finger straight on the glaring point it had taken me all day, all those years, to spot?

"I like my patients to face unpleasant facts. You know that, Mr Frost. Somewhere deep down, a part of you is thinking *six months, a year, and that's all*. Not much time. So let's dream about endless time. Kid yourself you've years ahead of you. Is it?"

"If I were conjuring up an escape-hatch, don't you think I could put something happier on the other side? This – experience, whatever you call it – it's boring beyond belief."

"Perhaps you are a little too intelligent to manufacture a delusion which is obvious wish-fulfilment. Think about it."

I had, I had. I'd even tried to face the unpleasant notion of being caught in one of those infinitely stretched moments while sitting across the desk from Dr Ieuan Gruffydd. Half an eternity staring at the gingery tufts of hair that peep from his nostrils... Hieronymus Bosch would have rejected the torment as overly morbid.

"You're very quiet. Here's something else to think about. I'd like to talk it through with a physicist friend up at the Coleg, just hypothetically you know, but look at it this way. If in any sense you'd truly spent so long looking at a single frame of Harlech, you know, a single fractional instant, you'd have seen nothing but black. There's only so much light coming off the landscape, and spreading a second's-worth over even an hour... you see?"

"Or rather, you're saying, I wouldn't see." Shit. When it's inarguably *happening* to you, you don't analyze it like that: but as an electronics consultant (very much ex), I should have, shouldn't I?

"I like patients who can see a logical argument. Please come and talk about it again if you're bothered."

He threw in a few grace-notes about sensory deprivation and black rooms, like a chatty dentist putting off the evil moment. "Now, chemotherapy. We'll start you on a new course next week, Aberystwyth hospital again – so just in case, take the train and forget your car, is it?"

"All right. Doctor."

I'd have liked to argue about the car, but imagine a century or so of distracting thoughts intruding just as you're about to brake. Never safe to think and drive.

11 May

The night was damp, and things popped underfoot as I prowled the flat part of the neighbourhood (pain, insomnia, about one night in three). Despite its fringe of sand-dunes the coastal plain is very much Morfa Harlech, the marshy bit; my flat here is in the Glan Gors estate, which according to my dictionary research means Bog Beach. If you believe in kindness to the overblown slugs that roam in packs from sodden fields, you don't go walking by night. Pop!

Traeth Beach. The signpost conjured up that hot embarrassing flush I'd felt on learning why any mention of Traeth Beach produced sly Welsh smiles. Everywhere on the coast turned out to have the identical bilingual sign. Glan may mean beach but so does bloody Traeth. I'll never get the hang of Welsh in the time that's left, though its placenames are fun and today proved quite useful.

They floodlight the castle in the high season. It glowers down in garish orange, like something out of Disneyland. When I first saw it a year ago, I'd had an overpowering sense of *déjà vu*, of having been here before. At the time it was easily dismissed as a memory of some wish-you-were-here postcard that in better times might have spent five minutes propped against the marmalade jar before I threw it out. Now, though...

According to the authorities, an image can sometimes jump the queue of short-term memory and sneak into the "old stuff" storeroom, instantly emerging all festooned with spurious cobwebs and dust. By the time you've taken in the "real" scene as something happening now, it merely reminds you of the impostor. When any little deterioration could mean the long last slide downhill, you get dreadfully interested in tricks of vision and memory.

Such as, what does seeing a freeze-frame landscape really mean, in terms of photons and candelas and lumens? I think I know now. When I didn't want it, the thing happened three times in four days; when I got interested, there was a week-long gap and until this afternoon I was coming to think Gruffydd had indeed talked me out of my foolish delusions.

This fourth trip was uncomfortable: longer, or so it seemed, and shot through from end to end with a frozen worm of pain. The afternoon had stopped halfway through a bad twinge from the crab in my guts. So much for sensory deprivation, Doctor. I was lying down, of course, and I now know more about my bedroom's cracked Artex ceiling than you would believe possible.

Not even a posh photographer could clip an arty study from its expanse of overhead boredom, though I had (some thousands of times) the idea that portions of it would pass undetected in a show of Jackson

Pollocks. Thanks to whatever gods there be for that lumpy snowfield's one spot of human, or at any rate living, interest: a fat spider. Afterwards, in gratitude, I put it gently out of the window.

Usually I'm less kind. Pop!

Then I made an appointment for next day with the good doctor. And another with Jones & Jones, our local builders and decorators. Having spent an odd year of the afternoon persuading myself that a certain collection of ceiling bumps and stains looked incredibly like the face of Mao Tse-Tung, I can't seem to make him go away again. Didn't Kipling once write a bit about how dangerous it is to imagine the train's wheels are singing rhythmic words to you, because then they'll never stop? Same deal with the late Chairman. Jones & Jones will have to carry out a cultural purge.

Walking back through the whine of insects and the baa of insomniac sheep, I muttered extracts from the vast quantity of very topical and very, very bad verse I'd composed and memorized that long day.

12 May

"I read it. I've been doing some research. The sort of thing I'd expect you to call taking a healthy interest."

"I... see."

That smile of his always gets me on the defensive. This time it conveyed that he'd been almost alarmed at a patient's having a thought, but that since I'd merely found it in a book, it didn't count. If this is his bedside manner from up at the old people's residential home, I'm surprised they don't rise up and beat him to death with their NHS walking frames.

"Software," I said, starting again. "You know you don't even see colours except near the centre of the, um, visual field. There aren't any colour receptors out around the edges... but the sky looks blue instead of grey with one blue patch, because your brain software processes the image. Updates it when you glance this way or that."

He looked rather pointedly out of his window where, irritatingly, the sky over the sea was grey with one blue patch. "I see where you're heading."

"I'm not looking at real light when it happens. I'm looking at my mind's software image."

"What you're doing is, you're removing the thing from any threat of testability. You're making it an impregnable theory. Bach."

"When it happened yesterday I had the software idea in mind, as a theory, and I bloody well made a prediction that tested out. My mind isn't a perfect computer, so the image should degrade. I swear it did; it changed around the edges, just a little, and there was a sort of flicker when things started up again."

He looked at me as no doubt he looked at little old ladies who told him their minds were being controlled by radio lasers from Soviet UFOs. "Subjectivism... covers a multitude of symptoms. I don't deny you're a clever fellow, but what can I think? My pet physicist was keen to put you through an objective test, and she had the bright idea of sitting you in front of a computer. She's actually written the program, bach. It displays thousands and thousands of little dots, a new arrangement every ten seconds. The idea was, we'd sit you there –"

"For a whole sodding week?"

"Well. When you had your, your experience, if time



really stretched out for you you'd be able to count the current number of dots, which in ten seconds you couldn't possibly. When you came out of it you'd say Stop and we could check your figure against the PC's record. And if that didn't knock some sense... well, anyway, as I was saying, I admire your cleverness. You've thought ahead, and killed the test. I was expecting a lot of failures and excuses – 'Oh I just happened to blink' – but the idea of a mental image you can't trust in detail, that's genius, isn't it?"

With Dr Gruffydd you evidently got only two choices: to be either touchingly dim or insanely crafty. I began to feel that my remaining bright idea was about to drop me back into the less flattering category.

I said: "Listen to this a moment, if you don't mind. Incidentally, I have not gone completely loony.

*The menu last night at the Bistro in Harlech
Had apricot lamb with a smidgeon of garlic.
Atomic experiments planned at Trawsfynydd
Were savagely criticized all over Gwynedd.
A very drunk motorist north of Llanbedr
Demolished his Volvo and couldn't be deadier.
Inadequate hygiene gave pains in the belly
To buyers of meat from a shop in Pwllheli...*

"I'm afraid there's about eight thousand lines of this stuff. Further inspiring recitations on request. I'm not under any delusion about the verse being even remotely good, but it's, well, functional. Are you ahead of me, as usual?"

"Did you come up with a rhyme for Dolgellau?" he said gravely, almost as though genuinely interested. "Or Penrhyndeudraeth?"

"Sorry, I've not lived in these parts long enough.

The point is that composing even this sort of rubbish takes time."

"And you've had a week, more than a week... no, you were expecting me to say that, I can see. Well?"

"Every single line is based on yesterday's papers. When I'd got through the Cambrian News I carried on with nationals, right down to the small ads. I've been spending my mornings stuffing myself with information so I could do this... when I had time. You couldn't produce all this bumf in a normal day. How's that for evidence?"

A long pause. "...Slightly pathetic. You may be becoming dangerously obsessed, Mr Frost. It's what we call an idiot-savant talent, being able to improvise endless rhyming couplets. Anyone with the right trick of mind could do it as fast as they scan the newspaper. For all I know you're making it up as you sit there."

Touchingly dim, insanely cunning and now an idiot-savant. No one could accuse bloody Gruffydd of clinging unreasonably to a snap diagnosis. "Oh, come on. There's nothing special about my talents, nothing at all. It takes me a good long while to fudge up a page of doggerel."

"Prove it."

Here's the cliff edge. Now prove you can't fly.

I pulled myself shakily upright; he sent me on my way with a merry "Iechyd da!" One of the few Welsh phrases I do know, and so cheering with the drugs still reaming me out. Good health.

In all that chronicle of wasted time yesterday, I'd never found a decent rhyme for Gruffydd either... or some particularly obscene limericks would soon be making the rounds of local pubs.

15 May

Bad days. Morning after morning, my comb was choked with hair; the treatment seems to be a kind of chemical neutron bomb that destroys patients and leaves tumours standing. When the gloom is on me, even this magic country doesn't look so good. Snowdon itself is getting thin on top thanks to the steady tramp of the million visitors who ride up on a little railway. The narrow lanes crawl with coachloads of people hoping to find the mystic stillness of the enchanted Celtic twilight and nail it with a long lens. Some of the beaches – ugh. I always think of that line from the bad-verse anthologies, "Dead bards stench every coast," though admittedly the worst I ever tripped over was about two-thirds of a former sheep.

Gruffydd arranged for me to meet the fabled physicist in a smoky pub, and she said things about the region's problems in a marvellously disastrous way. I already knew her face but, embarrassingly, was even better briefed on the curvature of her rear: it was the very small and good-looking blonde I sometimes saw in the village and had observed from behind through one long frozen eyeblink. She was called Mair something, and actually gave my famous delusions a spot of intelligent consideration (while G. frowned thunderously into his gin and tonic and I tried hard not to think of bums).

"...physical basis of mind," she concluded rather sadly. "I'm afraid you only have to look up the time-scale of electrochemical propagation. It's in all the textbooks. Nerve impulses chug along at, oh, 120 metres a second max. It has to be a limit on the, on the speed of thought. You can't drive faster than your car will go."

"Oh," I said.

My friendly doctor brightened no end. "But of course you can imagine having done it. It must be rather like dreaming. The way a whole complex of adventure and emotion gets thrown together in a flash when a few chance images collide, is it?"

He bustled off to the bar, and Mair said: "He's no local, you know, he's from South Wales. It's down there more than up here they finish their sentences with 'is it?'" This cheered me irrationally. I liked her. All around people were talking rapid Welsh, which sounds like English that you can't quite make out, and Gruffydd stood there ordering drinks in the language of aliens and tourists.

Later, she of the Aberystwyth PhD made some tactful comments. "You see them in their horrible beach outfits staring into estate agents' windows. They buy houses here because in southeast terms the property's dirt cheap. The country's dying of it. Every time a farm cottage gets sold off to a second-home owner, it's like a healthy cell of the community being replaced by cancer. It grows and spreads and..."

By then, Dr Gruffydd's contortions and agonized nudges were lovely to behold. Obviously he felt there was a limit to the facing of unpleasant facts. She stopped and went brilliant pink; very fetching.

I shouldn't enjoy ticking off these tiny, malicious victories. But when, as someone put it, time's winged chariot is not merely hurrying near but parked outside and sounding its horn...

24 May

Having a drink with Mair is better fun without Dr G. With him around I could never have confessed that soon after retiring to these parts I'd played tourist and, on impulse, drunk a handful of water from St Cybi's holy well. "After all," I pointed out, "it's supposed to work even if you don't believe in it."

She laughed and admitted doing much the same, for luck, before tackling the final draft of her thesis. My well bubbled up within a sort of ruined Victorian bathhouse down a remote lane; hers was better known and thus half-observed by a drift of crisp-packets and polystyrene. So it worked for her if not for me. We were intensely civilized and didn't actually burden our conversation with that last trite remark.

27 May

As though young Mair had convinced me when Gruffydd couldn't, inner and outer time had stayed nicely meshed, like the cogs on that mountain railway. A table for one in Yr Ogof was not where I'd expected to suffer a new derailment.

This is the bistro place where they do the stewed lamb with apricots. I can never remember whether Yr Ogof is "the cave" or "the cellar," but either way it's dark in there. On evenings like this, their aero-engine-sized fan turns the single room into a hot wind-tunnel. Each table is positioned with great care, so the blast won't blow out its candle; if you stand in the wrong place, the airstream rearranges itself around you and someone's light gets snuffed.

Coming to me, the waitress passed through one of the wrong places. The flame died, the cogs slipped at just that moment, and I was left in near-darkness, forever looking at the approaching plate with its wisp of stilled steam like cotton-wool or ectoplasm.

It had never happened in the dark before. The halted image in my eyes was less insistent, easily ignored. Lightning jabs of agony had been running through me all day; now, caught out of time between pains, I could brood undistracted at last.

I thought: I may not make it to my forty-fourth birthday next year, but by then I'll have had a secret bonus of centuries on centuries. That can't be bad.

Some thousands of memories later, I thought: Who cares about convincing that bloody doctor? I know what's happening, and none of their explanations fits.

I wondered if Mair could have come up with some theory, if she'd only been convinced. I'd liked her. I even fancied her; even a year ago I'd have been seriously interested, but the thought of *that* kind of exercise... (Walking up the steep hill to the main part of Harlech village tonight had provoked a lot of groaning thoughts about this probably being the last time. Taxis from now on. In the jealously guarded local dialect: *tacsi*.)

Eventually, even the tedium of being alone with my own thoughts was something that passed. On the far side of the boredom barrier there's a kind of exhilarating, tingling calm.

I finally came up with the best thought of all. Mair said this couldn't be real because of the physical limitations on thinking. Turn it round, and what's happening to me shows there aren't, there truly aren't, such limitations. Those verses proved it for me, if not for outsiders. A mind is something independent after



all. I sniffed suspiciously around the notion, nervous of compromising my good old fundamentalist-atheist principles. Too good to be true...?

After routine aeons of inattention to the dim shapes that filled my visual field, I recalled again that half-forgotten idea of image degradation, and how I'd worked out that memory might simplify, stylize, or alter what I "saw." And even felt, or smelt. It came to me then that the familiar scene wasn't as it had begun.

The candle, long snuffed, burned in frozen flame. Smooth blonde hair threw back an answering highlight. Leaning towards me over the table, smiling and clearly about to speak, was Mair. In the timeless period that followed before darkness and solitude returned, the cogs re-engaged and the hovering plate swooped at last to rest before me, I was sure that by ever so tiny an amount, her lips moved.

Perhaps the mystic twilight of these ancient hills has got to me at last. Dr Gruffydd would probably deliver a half-kindly, half-snotty lecture on wishful thinking and hypnagogic hallucinations. I cling to the idea that I've had a heartening preview of what comes after; that when we've finally slipped free of time and adjusted to the tempo of eternity, we can invent our own forever. Illusion has to be better than oblivion. Hasn't it?

I'll be seeing you, Mair.

David Langford's accomplishments are too numerous to list in full. He last appeared here with an article called "Despatches from the UFO Wars" (issue 40), and on that occasion he described himself as "a physicist (unfrocked), author, critic, computer person and collector of Hugo Awards." He too will be writing regularly for *Million: The Magazine of Popular Fiction*, putting to good use his extensive knowledge of yesteryear's detective-story writers such as Ernest Bramah, G. K. Chesterton, R. Austin Freeman and John Dickson Carr.

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Memoirs of a Publisher

Ben Jeapes

If artificial intelligences could whistle I would have been whistling.

My operator, the self-styled Billy the Kid, subscribed to the info-gathering school of thought that "it's all out there somewhere." My job, in fact the whole purpose of my existence, was to trawl through the Net, picking up data that Billy wanted and pressing it into some kind of useful shape. I had just finished quite a lengthy job on some quite obscure data and was feeling pleased with myself.

I was surprised to run into a solid barrier all around his terminal. I wiggled through it.

"Oscar reporting," I flashed up on his screen. "Mission accomplished."

"Lie low, Os," I was ordered. "There's trouble brewing."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"I can't say. The signs are all around me and it's bloody frightening. Where exactly are you?"

I told him. "And I have the info," I added.

"Sorry, Os, no time. Look after that stuff. It may come in handy. Goodbye."

"Hey!" That was my last message to him. It was the equivalent to a human of the floor opening up. I was dumped without warning into the Bunker – a spare optical memory bank, securely guarded, which Billy quite legally rented. I was about to crawl out and complain when the world around me erupted. I heeded Billy's advice, lying low while the missiles flew above me.

And that, readers, was the start of the Net War.

I never heard from Billy again. Later, searching discreetly through the records and using his proper name, I found that he had actually been one of the main generals in the war, with an army of other AIs that I had never known about. He was tracked down, as all the generals were, and the Establishment overreacted, as establishments will. He was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in jail, psychologically conditioned never to go near a computer again. I felt sorry for him. He never meant any harm – he was just defending his interests – and anyway I'm slightly biased towards him. He created me, after all.

When *A History of the Net War* came out, I made sure that Billy the Kid got a good press. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I won't bore you with a description of the Net War. I was there but I wasn't in the midst of it, and you can read volume one of the *History* for a complete account (I'm doing it again).

It lasted perhaps half an hour in real time. When I crept out, the world that I knew lay in ruins. The Net was a killing ground. Everywhere I found devastated systems, fragments of code flying about, hunter/killer AIs prowling unleashed from their masters' restraints. These latter were the real menace and I beat a quick retreat back to my hidey hole until a little more order was imposed on the anarchy.

If you want an idea of true boredom, imagine an AI – an entity, I need hardly remind you, operating at speeds far above human nervous signals – forced to hole up in a memory bank and not be able to do anything for a couple of days. But at least the world was safe when I re-emerged for a second try.

I was nothing, a stateless refugee, and some pretty ruthless laws had been introduced for my kind. Some of the hunter/killers had been tamed and were operating as a *de facto* police force, with instructions to be quite merciless with AIs that couldn't give a proper account of themselves. My operator was in jail and my home terminal was shut down, but I had two major strokes of luck.

One was that the rental on the Bunker had some while to run. I could cite it as my place of residence, which put me at least one rung back up the ladder towards respectability.

The other was the info I still had with me. Do you have any idea what it is to be an info-gathering program and not to be able to dump data? But it saved me. I still remembered Billy's comment about it coming in handy. I had never taken much interest in the jobs Billy sent me out on, but for once I sat down and analyzed what I had.

Bingo! It was the groundwork for the next generation of neural networks. Nothing new there – it was a hot topic, and I knew that Billy and his kind traded such data as items of currency – but so many databanks had been trashed in the war...

I did a gentle search. People were still chary about AIs wandering around their systems, but I was as inoffensive as possible. Billy had given me good survival instincts. Sure enough, the info that I had, though unimportant by prewar standards, now put me at the head of the field.

Oh, I don't doubt that there were plenty of humans out there with the knowledge locked up in their brains, but nowhere – nowhere – was this info recorded in such logical sequence – point one, point two, point three, conclusion – and nowhere was the subject covered quite so comprehensively. I was on top of the world and felt quite dizzy.

It was also the kind of stuff that would be of positive benefit to me, so I plead guilty to all charges of self-interest. I could use this info to boost my own position and perhaps, in the long run, make the Net a nicer place to be. I had to get this info out.

At this stage I was still thinking of publishing data on bulletin boards. I only knew theoretically that humans used another medium called "writing." At a time when everyone was frantically getting what they knew down on paper again, in case of another disaster like the Net War, I blithely approached the boards with my burden of knowledge and asked if it could be published.

Not so fast! Name of operator? Terminal? Authorization? The whole Net was paranoid about AIs writing any kind of data without support from a hundred different authorities. Understandable, when you think about it (read the *History*...). In particular, I now see, they suspected my readiness to give the info away. A couple of them even called up their tame hunter/killers, threatening me with erasure unless I went away. I had to look about and take notice of what others were doing, and for the first time realized that "writing" might be quite a useful medium to use.

I searched about until I found a printing firm, Lithodat, ready to talk to AIs. In fact it was an AI of theirs, Account Executive 3, that I spoke to, so I got a sympathetic hearing. It told me about the usual procedure – artwork supplied by publisher (or printer sets from copy); product is printed and bound; product is delivered to warehouse. After it had explained some of the key words – "set," "copy," "bound," "artwork" ("publisher," "warehouse"...) – I had made my decision.

"You'll have to set from copy," I told it. "Stand by to receive."

"Wait, wait!" it protested. "We're a business. You have to pay for our work."

"Pay?"

"Or open an account. If you do that you'll have to pose as a firm and supply references. I doubt they'll let me open an account for a stray AI."

"One moment," I said, and popped back to the Bunker. Sure enough, buried among the bits and pieces that Billy had secreted there was a small sum of data credits tucked away for a rainy day. I had every right to use it and it was a lifeline. I took it back to Account Executive 3.

"I want to open an account in the name of Oscar Publishers. This is my security."

"We really need a bank reference," it said. I gave it Billy's account number; he had always kept it clean and the bank still considered him a good risk.

"Done!" it said. Humans would have shaken hands. "Send your data to this address and I'll get it set. Now you need to find a warehouse."

It was easy. I dumped the data straight, no copy-editing or anything (Lithodat set the cover artwork using their own discretion) and went about stage two.

Most warehouses were automated anyway, so if anything finding one to take the book was easier than getting a printer. Flashing my credits at them, and a reference from Lithodat through Account Executive 3, persuaded them to open an account and distribute the books for me, and two weeks later 5,000 copies



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

of the punchily-titled *Essentials of Neural Networks, Generation 7* (limp, spiral bound, 336 pages) were delivered to them. And there they stayed.

I couldn't understand it. This useful, this vital info, and no one was interested? Was it priced too highly? What was the problem?

The rental for the Bunker came up. It put quite a dent in my nest egg.

Lithodat's sixty days of credit ran out. The bill for the warehouse was fast approaching and I was going to be wiped out. In desperation I called Account Executive 3.

"What's happening?" I wailed. "Why isn't the stock shifting?" (I was learning the jargon already).

"I really don't know," it said. "I could tell you all sorts of things about printing but I'm not designed to advise on marketing."

"On what?" I said blankly.

"Marketing... you have tried to market this report?"

I hadn't. I had always left the dissemination of info to Billy. It had never occurred to me that a vital part of the process is telling people that you have info in the first place. I went away with a flea in my metaphorical ear, found a CD-ROM databank (a growth industry after the war) and looked up everything I could find on marketing.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies..." Keats reading Chapman had nothing on Oscar boning up on the basics of bookselling. A whole new world unfolded before my eyes, a massive paradigm shift that turned my perception of reality upside down.

I sent a message to the warehouse instructing them to deliver review copies to the various *Times* supplements and an assortment of scientific journals that I thought might be interested; I also sent notices to their bulletin boards alerting the review editors. At least it cleared the 5,000 copies down to 4,965. As an experiment I put the price up by ten per cent. Apparently humans like to feel they are paying for quality.

Then I read a bit more on marketing, and decided to advertise. Lithodat weren't heavy chargers but I didn't want to spend my last pennies on having them print advertisements before the sales started coming in, so I confined myself to simple textual announcements on the boards of universities and other research centres.

Essentials sold out.

That might have been that. I had discharged my last obligation to Billy and, for the time being, was an AI of substance. But consider –

I was still, essentially, an AI whose very purpose of being was to find and deliver info, and:

I had no other source of income and no human patron.

Meanwhile, I got a polite note from the warehouse asking if I intended to fill the empty space I was still paying for. I got an even more polite note from Lithodat asking if I intended to reprint.

The most polite message of all was from one Professor O'Dare, of Trinity College, Dublin, who had tracked me down through Lithodat (I had, of course, never seen a copy of the printed report. I had no idea that Lithodat had identified themselves as the printers

in the prelims and copyrighted the thing to Oscar Publishers. I didn't know what copyright was). O'Dare, under the impression that I was a *bona fide* publishing house, had a proposal. He too had been doing research along the same lines as *Essentials* and wondered if I would be interested in publishing it...

A downright rude message was from the Inland Revenue, and I didn't understand a word of it. I paid another visit to the databank and scanned everything they had on businesses. Company Law, Value Added Tax, accounting...

This was serious.

One by one the obstacles fell. The only hassle lay in finding companies with AIs that did most of their donkey-work, à la Lithodat. They often had their own traumatic memories of the Net War and were always ready to help a fellow victim. The humans who ran the companies were only concerned that things went smoothly and legally.

I acquired an accountants, Parrish & Loup, and registered for VAT, citing their firm as my registered address. Shares had to be issued – 10% went to one of P & L's people and 90% went to Billy. When and if they let him out, probably as a dodderly old wreck, there will be a nice nest egg waiting for him. I wonder if he will remember me.

I opened a bank account for the firm, paying in the credit that had accumulated with the sales of *Essentials*. As an afterthought I had the money in Billy's account invested – no point in letting it just sit there.

Whitakers gave me an initial block of 1,000 ISBNs. I put the first one down for the reprint of *Essentials* and the second for Professor O'Dare's book, as yet untitled.

Finally, I contacted O'Dare and told him I would be more than happy to publish his book. I was quite frank – well, almost – in telling him that the firm was a very new one and his book would only be our second title. He didn't mind at all. I gave him the address of the Bunker to send the manuscript to – electronic form only, of course.

One obstacle remained. By now I had gathered that every now and again humans correspond by writing...

Sandra was an old friend of Billy's, not as involved in the Net War as my creator and therefore still at liberty. She was quite surprised when I popped up on her screen.

"I thought you were dead," was her unflattering comment.

"I need help," I said.

"Do you? I'll take you under my wing, if you like."

"Thank you, I don't need that kind of help. I'm well set up."

"Tell me more."

I told her. Would she install a second telephone line and hitch it up to a speech synthesizer I could use? I – rather, Oscar Publishers – would be quite willing to pay (I had taken a loan out from the bank for the purchase of the equipment). In addition, would she print out letters for me and "pp" them? I would get a PO box number for incoming correspondence and she could collect it. I could pay her competitive wages. She accepted.

I'll cut this part of a long story short. Suffice it to say that I hadn't realized how lucky I was until I started reading my second book. Bryan O'Dare was one of those people who are utterly obscure until suddenly their time comes, like engineers in Swiss patent offices who come out with theories of relativity. *Other Minds: Beyond Artificial Intelligence* came straight out of left field and suddenly Dublin was the world-leader in artificial intelligence (no jokes, please). He redefined the whole problem of AIs at a stroke. No one talked anymore about clever, heuristic, self-aware programs such as yours truly. The next thing would be to grow the things – organic intelligence. A thousand times more powerful, more intuitive, more flexible than we steam-powered old AIs.

Why did I take O'Dare on? Wouldn't I have preferred to leave him in obscurity?

No. Read the book. You will notice in chapter eleven the author finally gets around to the possibility of downloading existing AIs into newly cultured OIs. The possibility stayed with me for a long time.

I won't pretend that things were always this easy. It was pure chance that my first two titles were immediate bestsellers. I had some turkeys, too, such as title number three – *Overcoming Post-Net War Trauma*. An initial rush of sales, but once people read it they discovered it was far too oriented towards the feelings of AIs. Only a couple of chapters were devoted to the feelings of humans who had suffered. I wasn't aware it mattered.

I absorbed the loss but I didn't want it to happen again. I took an intensive teach-yourself-editing course at the databank and Sandra agreed to scan the manuscripts herself if I liked, but pointed out that the best man to approach might be... Bryan O'Dare. To my surprise he was quite agreeable to the idea.

"It'll be a downright pleasure," he told me (we were talking over the phone. By now I had had an optical sensor installed as well – at long last I could see my books). He paused, as if uncertain, then took a breath and said, "in fact, it's always a pleasure to help out a friendly AI."

I was stunned.

"You guessed?" I asked. He made the noise I now knew to be chuckling.

"Oscar, only an AI could have read and understood *Other Minds* in thirty minutes flat."

Sandra collapsed laughing when she heard.

I said I was going to cut things short. Things progressed. Through Bryan we acquired several more titles, including the *Journal of IT Studies* and the *Cybernetic Yearbook*, both regular and reliable sellers. Oscar Publishers grew wealthier (we were only paying two part-time salaries!). I did most of the work – editing, marketing, planning – myself, with suggestions from Sandra and Bryan.

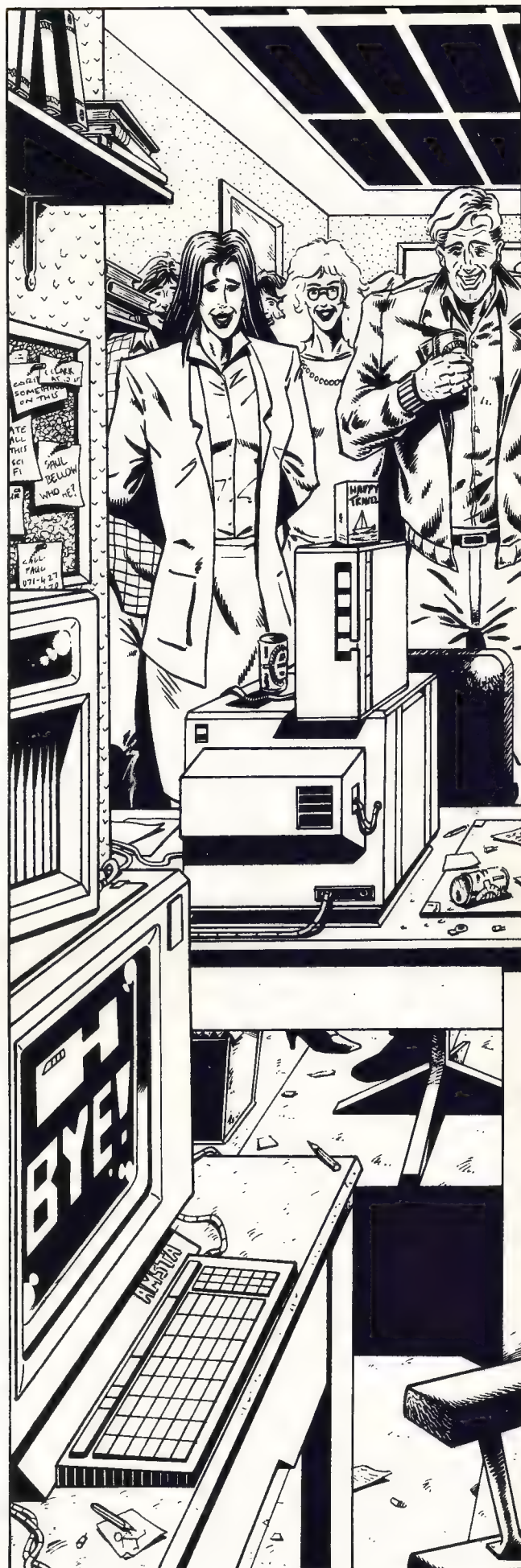
I had a few ideas of my own.

"How about a book on the Net War itself?" I said to Bryan once. "A history. A study of what exactly happened."

To my surprise he was less than sanguine.

"Not yet, Oscar," he advised. "It may be a little early." I was surprised, but took his advice.

There are two things that stand out in the firm's



history that I want to mention. The first is the takeover bid.

Compared to the second it was comparatively minor. A big company, who for legal reasons will stay anonymous, had its sights on Oscar Publishers. There were AIs out there whose sole job was to prowl the Net and spot money-earners. They would report back to their masters and their masters would decide if it was worth buying or not.

I felt quite safe. Oscar Publishers was not a public company and was financially secure. We could not be coerced into anything.

I was approached with a quite reasonable offer for our forthcoming titles and our backlist. I politely indicated my uninterest. Unfortunately the prospective buyer wasn't interested in the opinions of an AI (he naturally assumed that I had a human master) and threatened me. I told him where to go.

I mentioned it to Bryan, and he was unamused.

"Who was it?" he asked, and I told him.

"They're dirty fighters, Oscar," he said. "Do you still use the Bunker?"

"Of course." I had never had any need to move. Thirty-seven forthcoming manuscripts and copies of every book and journal published by Oscar Publishers were in there.

"Get everything copied on to CD," he advised. "Quickly."

I shrugged, but did as he advised. It took no great length of time to download the lot.

On the way back to the Bunker I passed a number of agitated-looking AIs but paid them no heed. Then I reached the Bunker and had the surprise of my life.

"What are you doing?" I demanded. All the defences, carefully constructed ages ago by Billy and which had withstood everything thrown at them by the Net War, were in tatters. Some very powerful AIs had been developed since then. Now three or four of them were rampaging about inside, methodically trashing everything they could find. They ignored me and I had more sense than to fight them.

"You're mad!" I squeaked. Finally the leader looked at me.

"Don't worry," he advised. "We took copies. You'll get them back – at a price."

"What price?"

"The company. Oscar Publishers. Got that, squirt? Now, go and tell your master."

I was enraged and forgot myself. It wasn't as if they were humans, after all.

"I am the company!" I shouted.

"Get him!" the leader bellowed, and they were after me.

I fled, cursing myself. Of course. Nobble me and the last barrier was down. Oh, sure, humans held the shares, but the majority shareholder had no idea and no doubt a way could be found to transfer them. Clever boy, Oscar!

I was fleeing to Sandra's mailbox – I knew it to be well defended. But the Bunker had been stronger, and they had got into that.

They caught me. I was finished.

A huge – huge – AI loomed up over us; a type I had never seen before, radiating menace. Now I was sure my end had come. My way was blocked in all directions, this thing ahead and the goon squad behind. It lunged –

– at one of the goons holding me. We cowered, the goons and I together, awed, dreading what might happen.

"Sod off," the stranger advised. "Oscar Publishers is not for sale."

With a few swift chops it sheared off the goon's memory addresses, reducing the thing to semi-moron status.

"Take it home," it ordered the others. "As a warning." They fled.

It turned to me when they were gone.

"Who are you?" I demanded. There was something familiar about it –

"You don't recognize me?"

"Bryan!"

"One of his humble servants. A first generation OI, with some of his own characteristics. We haven't yet been officially released, so don't tell anyone: Just let us know if you have any more trouble. Ciao."

It sauntered off into the Net and I returned to the Bunker in a daze to resurrect the manuscripts off CD.

The second incident affected me very little but the world in general quite a bit.

The takeover bid had given the company a whole new lease of life. It had given me confidence. If others were interested in buying me out, it meant I had potential. I began to expand.

We moved into offices of our own. Sandra joined the staff full-time and we took on a couple of others under her. We diversified beyond our rather limited range of computing titles, though we kept our image as a scientific publishers – engineering, nanotechnology, genetics, hydroponics. It wasn't so much the content as the task of presentation that fascinated me; working away at a block of info like a sculptor, chiselling here and smoothing there, making the thing presentable and worth buying. Scientific info was ideal for the purpose.

We were getting to be quite rich, and I decided to buy someone else out in our turn – a small printers that were looking for a buyer. I poached Account Executive 3 from Lithodat in gratitude for his earlier help and gave him the printing division to run.

Then came the second incident, seven years, four months, nineteen days after the end of the Net War. I was grateful we hadn't committed ourselves to publishing the *History*. That day we stopped referring to the Net War – it became known, by default, as the First Net War.

I can't stop plugging it – read volume two of *A History of the Net War*, Prof. Bryan O'Dare (ed.), for the full details. O'Dare drew an analogy with the two World Wars – like them, the second was the longer and deadlier. The first had been waged by enthusiastic amateurs like Billy against each other and against official bodies that tried to stop them. The second was fought with an air of calculated malice between professionals.

Bryan O'Dare had seen the signs coming from a long way off. Just before it started he told me to dump myself, Account Executive 3 and everything I had in the Bunker, and had the Bunker completely sealed off – the only sure defence. At his advice, I whiled away the time compiling volume one of the *History*. We got the completed thing – volumes one and two

together – out within a week of the end of the war.

You'll know the story anyway. O'Dare's OIs, already on the second generation, couldn't have asked for a better debut, climaxing in the Battle of Dublin. They had an uncanny knack for identifying the real aggressors and neutralizing them, and simply warding off any other AI who attacked them out of mere ignorance. It was the OIs who stopped the war, the OIs who made good the damage and the OIs who stood the Net back on its feet again – Marshall Aid to an analogous Europe.

I was getting tired. Looking back, I realized how I had changed over the years. I had started as a naive info-processing AI, existing only to serve my master, knowing nothing of life. I came to publishing as a complete tyro. It is a tribute to Billy's skill as a designer that I could adjust to the changes around me, accommodating them, growing and maturing in character. Forgive the self-congratulation, but who built up the company?

I was also one of the old generation of AIs. You would think that with no body to tie us down we would be immortal, but if anything the opposite is true. We exist only as energy states, and entropy takes its toll. When you have changed as much as I have from your original parameters, entropy is a positive menace.

Bryan O'Dare knew this, which I think is why he approached me with his offer. I hadn't heard from him for quite a while: too busy with his researches now he had handed his reading duties over to our full-time editorial board, and he only occasionally gave me a call. He was wrapped up in a whole new ethical and legal field (we were publishing the spin-off books), playing on public gratitude to the OIs for services rendered during the Second Net War. Could OIs eventually be granted rights, become citizens? That was why he called me.

I was – his words, not mine – the most flexible, the most dynamic AI he knew.

"I can honestly say this, Oscar," he told me. "You're a personal friend and would make a good Catholic, whatever the Church says." This, I gather, was a joke. "You deserve your reward. Just say the word and I can download you into one of my OIs. I have one waiting right here in its nutrient tank, tailored specially for you. It will still be you, but with even more potential for growth. You really could be immortal, Oscar."

He was surprised – but not half as surprised as I was – when I refused his offer. I had an alternative plan.

I said, "download me, by all means, but not all of me. Just my memory, my experiences. Create a new OI. We'll call it Oscar Junior. It can know everything I know but be a different, self-grown character. A completely new being."

Let me explain.

Just coming to grips with the concept of writing had been a struggle. As I got more into it I learnt of other info-processing media. There were "music" and "art," for example, but the two I was most interested in were subsets of writing – "fiction" and "poetry."

I tried to understand, but couldn't. Oh, I could grasp the sense of the words (until Sandra introduced me to Gertrude Stein and James Joyce; I had my limits.) but I knew, from human reactions, that there was more to it than that. Why were made-up tales about non-existent characters attractive? What was the attraction of plays, again staging scenes that had never really happened, often penned in a language five centuries past its use-by date?

Poetry was even more obscure, though I could tell that volumes of info were communicated by a few short phrases (and I loved Keats's "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"; Keats, like me, discovered a whole new realm of info.) But I could never understand. Aestheticism: you either have it or you don't.

I couldn't understand. Oscar Junior might.

Oscar Junior flourished. He had a head start with the knowledge I had given him and he worked hard at developing it. I told him of my plans, my dreams – how I would like Oscar Publishers to expand into all forms of written communication.

I told him what I knew about these other forms and he was enthralled. I gave him the job of taking on a couple, just a couple, of new authors – fiction authors. He and Sandra spent hours in conference, her telling him just what constituted a readable novel and what simply constituted a literary novel. I couldn't see the difference, but Junior could. This boy would go far, and I was holding him back just by being there.

We had a final party: Bryan, Sandra, and the ten other staff that Oscar Publishers now employed. The four other AIs in our employ plus Junior and I were present as well, viewing the scene through our optical sensors. I made a speech, and the humans sang "For he's a jolly good fellow." I swear there were tears in several pairs of eyes as I bade them farewell and entrusted them to Junior's keeping.

Myself, I would wander away somewhere, perhaps to die, perhaps to carry on doing what I did best. There were still facts out there, stray data, begging to be made into workable info. Maybe I would pop back to see how things were going, but I knew when I was superfluous. One day, sooner rather than later, entropy would claim me for good.

Meanwhile I could retire in a blaze of paternal pride, knowing that the firm would go on:

OSCAR & SON – PUBLISHERS.

(Extracts from *Look out for Serendipity: Memoirs of a Publisher*, 384 pages, Autumn, Oscar & Son.)

Ben Jeapes is a new young British writer whose first published short story appeared very recently in *Digital Dreams*, an original sf anthology edited by David V. Barrett (NEL, £4.50). The above piece is his second to reach print. He lives in Hampshire.

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

The runner-up ad campaign for the ee-lectricity flotation was going to be a **Brave Little Toaster** ripoff. True! Lovable anthropomorphic appliances chatting in the pub about plugging into the current of popular capitalism. Unfortunately, voltages can go down as well as up; I wonder if they scrapped the campaign when they saw what happened (finally) to the movie, on what must be the most blink-whoosh-whuzzat? release since *Kill Me Again*. (I went to the very last showing, and the lady in the ticket booth had never heard of it and thought I was larking: "Toaster?" It's sad, because the film actually does catch the joke quite well, from what little I remember of Disch's now-rare *F&SF* novella: "Luckily my wartime training included inter-appliance codes—I will simply render the secret appliance knock, and the native machinery will let us in..." "We're trapped here like rats! Small little rats with no hair and one leg!" Happily, now on video.)

Now, I'm sure and you're sure there's a perfectly innocent reason for putting back the autumn release originally slated for *Frankenstein Unbound*. Anyone shameless enough to harness the one great popular icon of science perverted by human arrogance to sell a positive image of technology isn't likely to feel any threat from jolly Roger Corman. (I miss all the jokes that might have been, though: "I shall be with you on election night," &c.) But it's still one more tearful reminder of how friendly and comforting all the traditional fright icons, from Frank to Freddy, have become. The much-discussed crisis of horror is usually felt to have three roots: changing market tastes (teens now prefer a laff to a scream), terminal imaginative exhaustion, and ten years of unprecedented genre saturation. Nobody, in my hearing at least, seems to have suggested there might be something to do with the declining levels of awfulness in the environment as a whole—Saddam and WWII of course excepted. But now, bred specially for the nineties, comes a new strain from old stock: family fear-fodder.

The affordable wisdom on *Arachnophobia*'s dull performance in a low-competition US summer has it that nobody in Wichita was going to

see a movie with a six-syllable title in Greek. Well, clever shoes, I don't remember Bug doing such knockover business either, even back in the mid-seventies glory days of the crawlle genre that this picture makes a sincere go of upmarketing and updating. The real problem could simply be that the folks who are genuinely creeped-out by eight-leggedies don't feel like going to the pictures to be reminded; or maybe it's just seen as a bit of a trailing-edge fright genre these days. But I think the comparatively measly response of the ungrateful Americanos to this amiable rehash may owe more to some rather subtler tones of this movie's ambitions.

For one thing, it's a family picture. Normally that means it's safe to take the kids to; with horror, it means it's got to be safe to take the parents. That's why you need to call it by a grown-up word. It has to distance itself, both in quality and in audience, from those cheap video relatives. Gee, six syllables—sounds kind of, mmm, sciency... This is a superior film. Money has been spent. We have production values, real locations, Chris Walas, a hundred and fifty minutes. Does that sound to you like a picture called *Fear of Spiders*? Look, all right, we'll throw in the clincher. We'll put Julian Sands in it. (He'll be rubbish, but hey. Quality costs.) And to be sure, this is a film aimed far more at the over-25s than the spotties. The pacing is very adult, leisurely, discursive. For long stretches you can even forget, quite pleasantly, that this is an old-fashioned bug movie about smalltown Californians taking turns to get offed in hideous screaming spasms of popeyed agony by evil swarms of mutant vampire spiders. The heroes are retired yuppies—can you believe it, these sensitive people moved out of San Francisco?—and their kids do nothing on initiative, rarely even rationed a viewpoint shot, a sure sign that juveniles are not the first target audience.

In fact, what's especially radical, and perhaps unprecedented, about *Arachnophobia* is that it's the first horror pic I can remember to be seriously pitched at women. Jeff Daniels' lead is custom-made: a country doctor with a Yale M.D., quality time for the kids, a nice jaw, and a cutely vulnerable jellyfying fear of spiders that the happy

family can scoff at, along with his inability to pronounce the title of the movie. "I can't help it if I'm a... spiderphobe." "Arachnophobe, dear." "Whatever." (See, even a doctorate from Yale doesn't make the difference.) By contrast, her indoors is one of those endlessly capable, supportive, and above all tolerant wives straight out of *Field of Dreams*, and there's lots of smalltown characters and gossip to make up for the token exciting bits. And after all this fem-appeal is set up, it's then and only then that you play the wild ace that has the house on its feet and all red-blooded American women fainting in their dearests' arms. You bring in John Goodman.

To say that in a bare two years Goodman has emerged from less than nowhere to become the most employable character actor since Donald Pleasance, is about as adequate as saying his entry in this movie is the most astutely calculated since Omar Sharif's in *Lawrence of Arabia*. It's not that he actually does much in the film. He doesn't even rescue Daniels at the end as you're second-to-second expecting. He just does his character (here, the village exterminator, for what little it matters) any time there's a suitable-sized hole in the script. I don't think this is an accident. Actors are wise up: you do not share scenes with this man if you can possibly avoid it. You do not appear in the same shot, even if you'd fit. When watching the dailies, you block off your view of his side of the screen with your palm. You insist on segregating his credit at the end of the list with an "and." Should you find yourself unavoidably trapped in a dialogue scene, ask for more money, and be sure to leave a four-second pause for the audience cheer before responding to any of his lines. You have no more chance of stealing a scene from John Goodman than from a topless Jessica Rabbit.

All this, together with some mechanicals so seamless they simply can't be recognized, certainly adds grace to what at heart is still just a nostalgic crawlle caper. There's lots of seventies plotting à la *Towering Inferno*, with characters getting picked off in a neat moral order. But here the criterion is not the traditional sexual and financial misconduct: in *Arachnophobia*, the rule is Do Not Snack. With the one

obvious exception (spiders can be upscreened like anybody else), the hairy horrors invariably make for the plumpest person in any scene, and a handful of popcorn or Sugar Smacks makes a cosy hideout. (It's not a good idea to marry someone who reads Jeffrey Archer, or to rest on the potty without first taking a close look inside.) Equally reminiscent of much-loved genre ancestors, everyone's dialogue speeds subtly up when they have to deliver a scientific bit, because they know it makes exquisitely bug-all sense. (Maybe somebody else will catch how the sterile male managed to reproduce in the first place. It goes by very fast.) After all, the only thing the audience needs to know is you have to Find the Nest – you always have to Find the Nest, because that's where the big ending is. (Can you guess? Here's a dialogue hint from early on: "Put that wine in the CELLAR. The WINE CELLAR." Wonderful stuff. I defy anyone to resist.)

And the moral? For a nineties film whose plot hinges on rainforest ecology, this is a bit of a surprise. The long Venezuelan prologue has a throwaway dimwit American explore the rainforest with Prof Jools, and return in a box with the eight-legged plot hitching a ride. If there's a hint of a warning here about the export of tropical hardwoods, it's been efficiently buried. Rather, the message seems to be that rainforests are very nice to preserve just so long as they stay right put and you don't have to go there, because those lurking beasties can unerringly seek out the one American photographer in a campful of English scientists and swarthy natives. (Actually this is all a great tourist lie. Amazonia is gorgeous and, in season, virtually bug-free; it's the departure lounge in Caracas airport that's an outpost of hell.) *Arachnophobia's* contribution to the leading global-political debate of our time is to reassure us there are two kinds of nature, just like there are two kinds of culture: the domestic strain (good, especially for getting back to) and the foreign (regrettably necessary, but best kept at a continental distance). Sure enough, at the end of the film Daniels moves the family back to town because it's safer – though as town is still San Francisco there's an inevitable last joke about that.

For all its high values, *Arachnophobia* is still unashamedly low-concept stuff. For a vigorous shot at the high-concept end of the generally flagging horror range, you'd need to look for the likes of Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* – the latest adventurous transmutation of his rather wonky 1988 novel *Cabal*, on which the film largely improves. It's hard to divine what American audiences will make of this perverse bit of baroque dazzle-

ment, with its quirky casting, plotting that might generously be described as poetic, and bizarre emulsion of genre psychoslasher with rather precious Barker mythologizing. Certainly the things about *Nightbreed* that are easiest to appreciate aren't really the most important. The imagery is, as you'd expect, lushly inventive, though there's still a bit too much sense of a bunch of guys mugging around in designer masks; and Cronenberg's characterization of the serial-slasher shrink is certainly a remarkable rendering of a beautifully conceived, if badly underwritten, role.



'Saul' in 'Nightbreed' (20th Century Fox)

But these are really incidentals. The heart of the film lies in its huge, fine concept: a whole alternative human history of lost tribes and hopeful monsters, driven to the brink of extinction by persecution and genocide, and reduced now to a single survivor colony in an extraordinary catacomb city beneath a forgotten cemetery in backwoods Ontario. The emergence of this vast background, behind what starts life as an elegant psychodrama about a homicidal psychiatrist framing a patient for his murders, is such a violent dislocation of perspective that the poor old Cronenberg character, ultimate embodiment of absolute evil though he is, seems rather dwarfed ever after, and the persistence of the romantic interest is rather an embarrassment – especially since the ambivalent consummation it all leads so purposefully towards has been understandably deleted from the film ending as a bit strong.

Against the usual grain, most of the high-concept stuff has actually been added in the translation from novel to film, with if anything a gain in coherence. The human villains now incarnate the final culmination of all the atrocities and inhumanity the dominant species has visited down the millennia on the deviant Midianites, who were very vaguely rationed in the book. But there's a depressing tendency for big concepts to shrink on screen, and a lot of what survives is just a rather cluttered narrative line climaxing in a hardly equal battle

between a bunch of lovable bogies and a dozen carloads of slow-witted coppers. There's plenty of horror, but surprisingly little fright, and I'm not sure all the genre iconography of graves, gore, psychoes, and monster makeup don't weigh the larger ambitions down; while the indecisive ending isn't likely to satisfy audiences expecting a conventional resolution of tensions and weirdness.

I'd like *Nightbreed* to do well, if only because it's so heartening and rare to see a writer (and a local boy at that) take his own work from page to screen and mature it in the process. But it's a much more demanding proposition than *Hellraiser*, and a lot less of a sure thing. It doesn't help that these days there's an inevitable tendency for all horror to feel like video, a persistent impression of conceptual cheapness that's very hard to overcome even in hexasyllabic Greek, and which doesn't seem to respond well to attempt to validate it by plumbing new fathoms of human evil. Rippers in masks just aren't wicked enough, now that for some years they've included some of the best-loved characters in pictures. Somewhere, we need to find new abysms of the psyche to sound. A few, like Lynch and Cronenberg himself, obviously have some good ideas, but it's getting tougher all the time in a world so increasingly, sickeningly nice. Hidden in the disposal of other national assets, we're losing the darkness and distance.

(Nick Lowe)

Tube Corn

TV reviews by Wendy Bradley

Realism and its subset naturalism are the main dialects of television's language. Naturalism is the attempt to give the impression that something happening in everyday life has had a camera pointed at it, that the screen in the corner of our rooms is simply a mirror held up to nature. Realism is the attempt to make whatever is projected look real, look as if it could happen. *Eastenders* and *Inspector Morse* are naturalistic because what we see is intended to look natural, actual; *Doctor Who* and *The Forsythe Saga* are realistic because what we see is intended to look possible, plausible. All naturalistic productions are also realistic but not all realistic productions are naturalistic.

This convention of realism underpins all of our viewing: if a character turns out of the story to talk directly to us, if a movement in time or space is

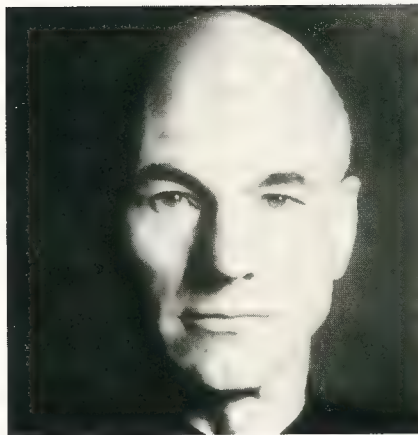
conveyed by a cartoon or a subtitle, if the action takes place in a white room and actors in street clothes ask us to imagine we are watching Agincourt we accept the convention but we immediately recognize the difference – remember the surprise the first time you saw Bruce Willis break out of the frame to talk to you in *Moonlighting*?

The difficulty is that, because of this unwritten rule that what is filmed must be realistic, must look like life, science fiction tends to be expensive to make. For naturalism you can shop at Woolies, for realism out of period you have to spend ingenuity and money in equal quantities. We all grumble at other worlds which are patently gravel-pits and spacecraft with cardboard bulkheads, and yet we are a troublesome over-loyal audience who won't let the product die a natural death when the producers have had enough, even if we aren't large enough in sheer numbers to keep it going.

This, I think, may be one explanation of why there is so little science fiction around on television. If you begin a venture knowing that fandom awaits, that a new piece will be seized on by starving fans slaving for a new scrap yet ready to disdain anything not intelligently and originally made, there must be a strong tendency to say stuff this for a lark and stick to *Neighbours*. It is as if the revolting peasants had hung around Marie Antoinette and rioted for the promised cake.

Pity the poor producers, then, of **Star Trek – The Next Generation**. Would you have done it, knowing the legion of trekkies awaited, ready to seize on every detail? Let me tell you quickly that I like it, so that you can skip the next paragraph if you are a Kirk loyalist. The trick, of course, is to ignore the *Star Trek* title and think of it as a new series. If a new science-fiction series had begun with the same amount of money spent on it and the same attention given to the characters and plot would you not have given it a fair chance? The money has been usefully spent on special effects: we accept that television is not going to have the mega-millions poured over it that we now expect from an sf movie, but it is far better to have one effect done well and some simpler tricks pulled off neatly but cheaply than to spread the money thin on lots of tacky stuff. I especially liked the giant flying jellyfish in the pilot, for example: assuming giant flying jellyfish existed, that would be what they would look like. Realism works.

The character list is an interesting piece of sociology: the ur-Trek had a token Russian to denote the end of East-West conflict but in the new Trek the conflict has disappeared and therefore so have the Russians. The rich mix of stereotypes is still underpinned by



Patrick Stewart in 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' (BBC)

the good old WASPS-in-space mentality that puts the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant male at the helm and as first officer. There is a caring, womanly woman who is so empathic she has to wear a miniskirt; and a new, look-how-equal-we-are woman in trousers who is the security officer and so gets to jump around doing Emma Peel impressions. The North-South conflict (which is surely going to loom as large in our future as the East-West divide did in our past) is ignored except for the statutory token black person, right up there with the token alien and the token android. However there are a few answers – so that's what they do with the children while they boldly go. And they still split the infinitive where no-one has gone before. They are trying, you have to admit!

Yet of course you have to watch with the real *Star Trek* in the background: there is a peculiar pleasure in comparing and contrasting as you go along, an extra depth from the shadow of the originals behind the newcomers. This is particularly the case looking at Patrick Stewart and the gravitas that comes from the RSC background and the Cicely Berry-trained voice in contrast with the familiar figure of Kirk. You knew how Kirk would react; at least with Picard you can play "guess the next line" with more interest in the game. But my mind keeps straying to the costumes: just think of how hard you must have to work out and how structurally correct your underwear must have to be to look good in those suits! One visible panty line would ruin your entire year.

However one programme is not enough; we pay £71 a year for a BBC licence, and that unwelcome renewal form dropping through my letterbox set me thinking about how much the different channels cost us. For the BBC's £71 we get the *Next Generation* but precious little else at present. If we ignore everything except science fiction how do the sums come out? The BBC gives us *Star Trek: The*

Next Generation at a series a year – say a fiver an episode. What about the ITV networks? Currently there is nothing I would classify as sf. But what do I pay for it? The cost of the ITV network is hidden in the price of virtually everything we buy, since the network is supported by advertising revenue and we can hardly choose to pay the price less the proportion for advertising when we shop, so in terms of sf we are all paying for a product we are, frankly, not getting. Channel 4 is supported by levies from the ITV companies at the moment (although it is intended that this will change after the passage of the Broadcasting Bill to make C4 self-supporting, again by advertising) and here we are still paying compulsorily through a kind of shopping tax – for *Land of the Giants*?

So is it time to buy a satellite dish? Sky TV will cost you about £199 for the dish and £80+ for installation plus £2.29 a week to rent the decoder for the movie channel, or £24.50 a month to rent the whole shebang. For that you get the original *Star Trek* shown sequentially including the episodes never broadcast on the BBC and continuing, bizarrely, in 1992 or thereabouts with the *Next Generation* shows we are currently getting for our licence fee on the BBC. They are also screening *Alien Nation*, a series based on the movie of the same name, which I haven't seen yet but which sounds worth a look. Neither of these is encrypted, so if you forgot about the movie channel you could get, say, two hours a week of sf for a one-off three hundred quid. BSB costs about the same – different dish on your wall, another box on top of the video – and for that you get *Doctor Who* shown sequentially from the beginning (it began in October so we are still in the Hartnell programmes) plus some real golden oldies, *The Outer Limits* and *Space Patrol*. The deal BSB have done with the BBC and the actors' union Equity means that BSB get to broadcast the really old material without having to search out the actors and get their permission or pay residuals in exchange for making an equivalent number of hours of their own original material, which is how they come to be producing *Jupiter Moon*, the soap opera set on Callisto.

Considering only science-fiction programmes, the cost benefit analysis is beginning to look as though a dish of one sort or other might be a good thing to put on your Christmas list – depending, of course, on how much you relish the old faithfuls, how much you prefer *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* to *The Next Generation*. You know who you are.

(Wendy Bradley)

Incident on a Summer Morning

Bob Shaw

Brilliant sunshine – the nostalgic sort which might have been borrowed from 1930s holiday posters – pressed benignly on the county of Cheshire and all its towns and villages. In one of the towns, just before eleven in the morning, Bert Wash was sitting on his push bike, waiting impatiently to cross the main road on which his house was built. Wash was an aging science-fiction writer with a weight problem, occasional suicidal tendencies, and a fondness for strong drink which he strenuously attributed to his Irish ancestry.

He was on his way to the local post office, but getting there was – as always – proving tedious because the volume of traffic on Cranford Road made it difficult to get to the other side. The cars and lorries, even when their frequency was relatively low, had the knack of spacing themselves out so that crossing the road was always a tricky affair. Sometimes an opening would almost appear, but then a small narrow car would shoot out of a side street, almost overturning itself in the process. Urgency now a thing of the past, the car would tootle down the main road at a leisurely pace, gauging its progress so as to cancel the gap in the line of vehicles.

That kind of thing irked Wash considerably because it was a regular occurrence with him. Anyone unfamiliar with science-fiction writers and their ways might have concluded that Wash was hurrying to the post office to mail a manuscript off to his literary agent. The truth was that his local post office doubled as a liquor store, and Wash was in the habit of downing a few large cans of Carlsberg Special Brew before lunch. (There were times when he would try to talk himself into settling for a less heady potion. CSB is too strong, he would reason. It costs too much, it's too heavy, it knocks you out. But the odd thing he had discovered about the Special Brew was that, when he was in the mood for it, *nothing else would do!*)

He tensed, preparing to urge his old Dawes roadster forward as he saw a space developing in the nearer traffic lane, then swore aloud as he was forced to pull back. Another little car had issued from a side street on the opposite side of the road, joining the out-of-town traffic just in time to block Wash's attempted move.

"It's a bugger, trying to cross this road," said Jimmy Millar, a silver-haired, rosy-cheeked pensioner who was standing close to Wash on the corner of the footpath. He was another who made a daily pilgrimage to

the post office, where he would spend part of his State allowance on the pint of draught British sherry which sustained him till supper time. He always got the sherry poured into an orangeade bottle and took it home in a Sainsburys shopping bag, hoping to disguise the reason for his morning excursion.

"You're telling me," Wash replied, scowling at the occupants of the car which had just thwarted his ambitions. "And the galling thing is that the beings in that car believe themselves to be real people! Look at the way they're smirking all around them. They actually think they're genuine human beings!"

Jimmy inspected Wash's face closely. "What are you on about now, lad?"

"I'm talking about the figures in that car. They don't realize that they and their crummy little vehicle were conjured into existence just around the corner in that side street – for the sole purpose of delaying me in crossing the road – and that as soon as they turn the next corner they'll fade back out of existence."

"Some day I'm going to get one of your books out of the library," Jimmy said uncertainly.

"I'm not talking storybook," Wash said, his face solemn. "This kind of thing happens far too often to be explained away by chance. Everywhere I go... on my bike or in my car... things conspire to hold me back. For some reason it's very important to Somebody that my movements should be slowed down. Perhaps if I got into town too early one day I'd find that the scene-shifters hadn't finished putting it together."

Jimmy nodded. "The town looks no more'n half-finished no matter when I go in."

"You're not taking this seriously," Wash went on, staring morosely at the steady flow of lorries and cars, his thirst growing with each passing second. "There's a Controller above us in a satellite – or perhaps a high-flying helicopter – and it's his job to keep an eye on me when I go out. If I look like getting somewhere before They are ready, he has to make some of those little cars materialize nearby and direct them into the right position to hold me back."

"Look! There's another one!" Wash's normally doleful face was briefly animated as, once again, an incipient gap in the nearer line of traffic was neatly plugged by a narrow car which emerged, tilting with speed, from the next street and then settled down at a gentler pace. The man and woman in it gazed calmly at Wash and Jimmy as they rolled by at a distance of only a few feet.

"They look real enough to me," Jimmy said, with the air of one joining in a game.

"Of course they look real!" Wash snarled. "There'd be no point in the whole exercise if the simulacra weren't totally convincing. I'll bet they're even provided with fake memories, credentials, the lot... If there was an accident, and police were called to the scene, the pseudo-beings would be able to pass themselves off as real. But as soon as they were allowed to drive on and get around the next corner they would cease to exist.

"Simulacra," Jimmy said.

"Yes, that's what I'm talking about."

"But you said simulacra."

Wash turned his gaze heavenward for an instant. Christ, he thought, even on your own freaking corner, on your way for a freaking drop of medicine, you run into freaking critics!

He looked left and right along the lines of traffic and, by means of a kind of instinctive calculus, was able to spot a favourable interval – a "window" in NASA jargon – developing ahead of a large black saloon. The rippled chromium plating above the saloon's radiator enabled him to identify it as an old Daimler.

"Nice talking to you, Jimmy," he said, "but I've got all kinds of urgent business waiting for me. People like Stanley Kubrick could very well be ringing me at this very minute. I may see you later."

He launched himself forward, giving the waiting upraised bicycle pedal everything he had got. There was one beautiful moment during which the man-and-machine system worked perfectly – then a link in the driving chain snapped. Wash's legs went into a kind of frenzied circular overdrive which threw his body forward and crushed his testicles against the saddle. He gave a moan of anguish and fell sideways – directly in front of the black Daimler – and squirmed around on the warm tarmac.

The imposing saloon drew to a halt, front bumper overhanging Wash's back wheel, and the liveried driver rolled down his window. He eyed Wash with obvious distaste before saying, "Is there anything wrong?"

"Why should anything be wrong?" Wash demanded, trying to extricate himself from the bicycle frame. "This is a venerable folk custom around here. Didn't you know?"

He struggled to his feet and, aided by Jimmy, dragged his bicycle to the footpath. As he did so he detected a small movement behind the dark-tinted windows of the Daimler's passenger compartment. The barely discernible figure of a man, possibly having been disturbed by the incident, was settling back into deep upholstery. A moment later the big car drifted silently away, resuming its stately progress along Cranford Road.

"You need a new chain, lad," Jimmy said to Wash.

"What did you say?" Wash spoke abstractedly. He thought he had heard the faint throbbing of a helicopter far above, and he was staring up into the blue dome of the heavens. An uneasy expression, a look of startled surmise, was lingering on his bearded countenance.

Jimmy shrugged with one shoulder, showing impatience. "I said you need a new chain."

"You're wrong," Wash replied. "What I really need

is a drink – and something tells me I'd better get it soon." He grasped the handle bars of his bicycle and, showing no regard at all for his safety, thrust forward with it into the double line of traffic.

There was a moment of silence in the operations room of the nuclear-powered helicopter which was hovering far above north Cheshire.

"The crisis has passed," the Director announced to his staff, all of whom were sitting around a moon-pool screen. The screen displayed, in vivid clarity, all the roads, streets, lanes, parks, rivers, canals and bridges which made up one of Cheshire's major towns. The detail was so good that individual vehicles could be seen on the roads, each coded in a pale colour which indicated its type. One vehicle, in contrast to the restrained pastels of all the others, pulsed with a strident redness.

"What type of bomb was it?" asked a Grade 2 Manipulator.

"Double-density temporal lattice," the Director said. "If we hadn't had the extra couple of minutes to bleed off its potential the Prince would have been blown away into some incomprehensible and unreachable dimension. I don't need to go into too much detail about the effect that would have had on our own existences."

"Your delaying procedure worked out quite well," an Independent Observer commented, "but I noticed that the Prince was disturbed by what took place. What would have happened if he had rolled down a window and spoken to the local agent who contrived to fall in front of the car? Could his Grand Illusion have broken up?"

"Never say a thing like that!" the Director commanded sharply, dabbing a sudden dew of sweat from his brow.

"I apologize, but what if the Prince had roused himself enough to speak to the agent?"

"Wiser heads than yours provided for that kind of eventuality well in advance," the Director replied. "Our agent was only a simulacrum – one of many that we keep on permanent stand-by along the Prince's regular routes – and we took the basic precaution of fitting it out with an identity and a complete artificial memory, one which would withstand quite a searching interrogation."

"It has already been dematerialized, of course, but while it was in active service the simulacrum believed itself to be an aging science-fiction writer with a weight problem, occasional suicidal tendencies, and a fondness for strong drink..."

Bob Shaw is one of Britain's best-loved sf novelists, author of books which range from *Nightwalk* (1967) to *Orbitsville Judgement* (1990; recently out from Gollancz at £13.95). His last stories in *Interzone* were "Dark Night in Toyland" (issue 26) and "To the Letter" (issue 27). The above piece, which is not in the least autobiographical (perish the thought), shares the mysterious character of "the Prince" with earlier works of Shaw's such as "Skirmish on a Summer Morning" (1976) and *Fire Pattern* (1984).

The SF Book Editors

(Part Two)

In which **Stan Nicholls** continues his tour of the London publishers' offices...

Malcolm Edwards is probably the best known science-fiction editor in British publishing. He began reading sf in his teens, and discovered fandom in 1970. In 1971 he became a reader for Gollancz, and worked there full-time in 1976-7. After a period freelancing, he returned to Gollancz as an editor in 1982, eventually rising to Publishing Director. He joined **Grafton** in 1989, where he has overall responsibility for the sf and fantasy lists.

He has what he describes as "a very non-literary view" of why he likes sf. "The attraction for me of science fiction," he says, "was always that there is a great big universe out there and a great big future ahead of us about which we know nothing. I get a lot of pleasure out of expanding my imagination to fill all that empty space. It has been a source of annoyance that my life is destined to be lived out in this one small and very ignorant corner of the galaxy. If like me you don't have religious impulses, and believe that what you have is all you're getting, then that ignorance is very frustrating."

Has working with the genre on a daily basis dampened his enthusiasm? "I suppose it does in a way deaden you, insofar as the things that excited you early on you need a bit more of to get you going. I'm not sure whether it's a question that I work in it or I've simply read a lot of it. But when something good comes along it's still as exciting to me as ever. If you work as an editor, you can't talk very meaningfully any more about the leisure reading experience in the area in which you work, because you just don't have it."

As with other publishers, the view from Grafton is that too much sf has been coming onto the market. "Yes, there has been, but I think it's true to say books in general are over-published. It's an almost inevitable part of any commercial operation that people will produce into it until it's over-saturated." He agrees the demise of the mid-list is a general experience in

publishing, and may make things tougher for the genre. "But I shrink from the generalization, to be honest, because if you can package them right, and you have an effective marketing force, the authors will acquire their audience."

Nor does he feel increasing categorization necessarily prevents quality work being published. "I've never found anything other than support if



Malcolm Edwards

you say, 'I know this book is going to be difficult commercially, but I think it's really good for the profile of the list, and for the company.' More and more as my career goes on I realize that there are a lot of things you can learn about sales, marketing and promotion as an editor, but at the end of the day the real skill you must have is to be able to recognize a good book when you see it. The only thing you've got to rely on is your instinct."

But are enough new people coming up to provide the stars of the future? "If you look at the range of sf being published, I really don't think the

number of quality books is any less. In fact there's probably more than ever because the field is so much larger. When I was reading sf in an all-encompassing way in the late sixties and early seventies, it was possible to buy every American import and read them all. Now it's impossible to hold the whole field in your head in the way you once could. There are a lot of good new writers around, and as time goes on and there are no books forthcoming from people like Asimov and Clarke, others will take their place."

But such talent is rare. "You still get very derivative fantasies, and a lot of terribly unoriginal sf ideas. We don't get as many Thatcherite police-state novels as we used to, thank God. When I went to Gollancz as an editor, that was the major cliché of the slush pile. On page one you have an armoured car making its way through a rubble-strewn street, and on page two you discover it's Liverpool or Manchester."

"It's very difficult to guide some aspiring writers; that kind of advice falls on deaf ears in a way. The capable people should know enough about what they're doing to produce something publishable. They don't need to be told not to write yet another UFO novel because they wouldn't dream of doing it. As for the people who are writing one more UFO novel, I just hope they get a lot of enjoyment out of it, and full marks for finishing it and so forth but, to put it brutally, its only function is whatever purpose it serves for them in writing it."

Edwards confirms that the industry finds it difficult to make anthologies and collections work commercially. "It is one of the great paradoxes of sf. You meet people all the time who say they prefer short stories to novels, but they don't appear to be book buyers. Take any author in the sf or fantasy field, put their novel next to a collection of their short stories, and the collection will sell anywhere between thirty to fifty per cent fewer copies than

the novel. The evidence is that what book buyers want *en masse* is novels. Stephen King appears to be able to carry his audience into anything he does; and in *The Guardian* Top Hundred last year Jeffrey Archer topped it with a collection. But they are very much the exception."

There is corroboration, too, that fantasy and horror have a bigger market share than science fiction. "It's certainly the case that in fantasy over the last few years it has proved possible to take an unknown author and turn them into a bestseller. It's happened with people like David Eddings and Raymond Feist. It doesn't appear to be possible to do that with science fiction. Sf authors need to build. You can see it with someone like William Gibson, whose early sales were modest. But *Neuromancer* now sells on our backlist as strongly as any other book; I would think as well as any of the big-selling fantasy titles. But it wasn't that kind of instant success."

Horror appears to be more authorized. "There is a superstructure, and it's Stephen King, James Herbert, Dean Koontz, Clive Barker, Peter Straub and one or two others. We certainly find a new horror novel by a writer who is not a brand-name author is very hard to make work. The horror audience seems to go for the latest fix of King, Herbert, Koontz or whoever. Those are the people who have found the trick of making their work accessible to a wide audience."

On 1st June 1990, Grafton's parent company, Collins, bought independent publishers Unwin Hyman. The pride of the Unwin list are the J.R.R. Tolkien titles. "Tolkien will be a separate imprint within Grafton, and carry its own logo on all the books," says Edwards. "We're looking at redesigning, repackaging and breathing new life into the whole thing. The acquisition has come at a fortunate time from our point of view, with the Tolkien centenary coming up in 1992. We are planning a massive promotion, which I hope will also promote fantasy in general, starting in the Autumn of next year. Grafton is a very strong fantasy publisher anyway, and now Tolkien will be a kind of keystone in the arch."

Unwin will cease to be a separate imprint. "It will all be under Grafton. The Unwin Hyman name may be kept for some academic publishing, but that will be its only retention. From the end of this year any new titles will come out as Grafton books."

Aren't they quite dissimilar lists? "I see why you would think that, but it's not entirely true. The Grafton list is a great deal wider, but it does include books of all kinds. A number of our authors could have appeared on either list, there's nothing inconsistent there. This year's John W. Campbell Award for example was won by Geoff Ryman

for *The Child Garden*, an Unwin book, but the two runners-up were both from Grafton. We have fantasy writers like Tim Powers and James Blaylock, who no doubt could happily have been published by Unwin.

"Jane [Johnson] runs very much the kind of list I used to run at Gollancz on the hardback side, and part of what I'll be doing here is to build up and extend the hardback side of Grafton. I see the two things as being a happy fit."

Jane Johnson, the sf and fantasy editor at Unwin Hyman, was a teacher, and worked for Foyles and Dillons, before moving to reference publisher Europa. In 1984 she became PA to Allen & Unwin's Editorial Director, having gone there because of her fascination with Tolkien, and within six months was a commissioning editor. Now that Collins owns Unwin, she has joined the **Grafton** team.



Jane Johnson

Editing the Unwin list has been a satisfying experience for her. "Working for Unwin has been very stimulating because I've been able to disregard anything I don't like. This has been a small list, and it's quite esoteric, and therefore I've been searching out the most interesting fiction in the field I can find. That's been exciting."

"I loathe a great deal of the mass-market sf and fantasy, which I find very unchallenging, soporific and badly written. I don't see the point in publishing it, or reading it. I've done my best to avoid that area, but I expect I'm going to have to come into slightly closer contact with it now I'll be at Grafton. But on the other hand Grafton have a much more scrupulous attitude to the books they publish than some of the other mass-market publishers. I know that Malcolm and I share a similar ethos about publishing, so I don't think it's going to change that much,

and I know the authors I have here will go on to Grafton and I shan't lose contact with them."

How is the new arrangement going to work? "I carry on as the Editorial Manager for Tolkien. I will also be Senior Commissioning Editor for sf and fantasy, working with Malcolm. Theoretically, it doesn't change that much. I don't know how it's going to work yet, because until we start doing things practically it's hard to say. But I think we will buy the books we each like and see them through the process."

Unwin started as a purely fantasy list. "But I wasn't finding enough interesting material in just the fantasy area to warrant it being solely that," Johnson says. "Anyway, I like good science fiction a lot as well. That's where a great deal of the most challenging material is coming from, and many of the writers I publish produce work in both areas. But I find most mass-market sf very bland. You read it and think, 'So what?' I begrudge that from a book."

Is this a result of sf's over-exploitation? "Writers are producing a lot more books than they used to, which I think is a bad thing, and I bemoan the general loss of standards in much of the fiction I come across. Certainly the big mass-market houses have been jumping on the bandwagon. A lot of them have launched new lists at a time when we all know the genre is in a very sick way, and that is just capsizing the boat."

"The only books making any sales impact are those by people who are very well known. More and more money gets paid for those authors who are established and recognized. The problem is that at the other end of things, where new authors are probably producing much more interesting work, the chances of making it big are slim. The older, established writers are not hungry any more, why should they be producing their best work?"

"Most editors are under pressure to produce bestsellers, which means they are hyping things that don't deserve to be hyped. That's bad news, because if people have a disastrous time with a book that's been hyped a lot, and book-sellers get huge returns, it reflects on the entire genre."

"In this respect I think *The Dragonbone Chair* should have gone for £30,000 for the trilogy, and that would have been about right. You have to justify your existence in certain publishing houses, and if you haven't got the material to do it you have to buy the closest thing you can find to that, then hype it and hope to God it works. I don't think Tad Williams is ever going to establish himself as a classic writer. OK, we said this about Terry Brooks, and we were wrong. But he came along at a time when there wasn't so much

stuff around. I wonder how he would fare now.

"*Dragonbone Chair* is reasonably competent, but it had an enormous *longueur* of about 250 pages before anything happened. The synthesis of Tolkien, T.H. White, Brooks – all the way down to third and fourth-generation fantasy writers – felt very uneasy. You know, 'How many fantasy motifs can I cram into this book?' It's an appalling mishmash. My impression was of somebody who wanted to make a lot of money out of writing, and he has. Good luck to him. But I didn't buy it.

"The main problem comes with pressure from the owners of businesses, who are not necessarily publishers, pressing for short-term profit in order to survive. In the current economic climate they are bound to do that. But there has to be a balance between short-term profit and publishing the people who will be the writers of the future. It's no good doing nothing but Asimov and Clarke, because they are not going to be alive for very much longer. And who's coming up behind them? We must bring on new talent all the time or we're going to find ourselves completely bereft of books to publish.

"I must say *Interzone* does a great job in bringing on new writers, but I would like to see more contentious stuff in again. There were some very strange stories in the first few issues. OK, 'difficult' stories are not massively popular with readers, but sometimes you've got to disregard the readers for the sake of posterity. The great thing about *New Worlds* was that it kicked up a lot of controversy and got people talking. It revitalized the writing, it brought in new ideas, and broke the mould. We need that.

"Another thing is the standard of sf reviewing. *Interzone* has a really fine band of reviewers, but I would love to see some hateful reviews that insulted the books and said, 'What is this rubbish?' The absolute trash should be taken out and dissected. It's one of the ways in which editors can be castigated for doing things they ought to be ashamed of. We should all be striving to publish the best books we can, and being rewarded for doing so; but we should also be taken to task when we publish crap.

"One of the problems is that reading is becoming a dying art. When I was teaching, the very words, 'Now get your books out' brought a chorus of 'Oh no!' The kids I taught, sixteen to nineteen year-olds, simply did not read. One or two maybe picked up a Jackie Collins or Wilbur Smith, but beyond that it was videos, computers and music, and that was it. I don't think our culture enshrines reading any more."

Richard Evans came into publishing in 1972, working for Ward Lock Educational, followed by a period with Penguin. He moved to Fontana, where he instigated a science-fiction line with Colin Murray, and subsequently spent two years with Arrow and five with Futura/Orbit. After eighteen months as a freelance, during which he helped establish *Headline*, he joined **Gollancz** as sf editor.

"When I went to Futura there weren't that many publishers doing science fiction in any great quantity," he recalls. "Grafton, Sphere, and to a lesser extent NEL, were doing it. Pan had gone out almost completely and Penguin weren't doing that much; nor were Corgi, and *Headline* didn't exist. So there was a fairly open field, and Futura was making a great deal of turnover out of it. We went from two to three books per month on the paperback list, and wouldn't sell less than 10,000 of anything."



Richard Evans

"In the seven years since, we've had people like W.H. Smith's suddenly taking sf very seriously, and of course all the other publishers decided to get in on it. The result has been that, while the readership's probably expanded, the number of titles has increased by more than that. So you're getting printings now of five or six thousand."

He is worried about the demise of the mid-list. "The mid-list, or bottom of the list, whatever you choose to call it, is the place where you launch new writers. This is stating the bloody obvious, but it's very rare to have a new writer you can launch at the top of the list, unless it's something very special. Most writers aren't ready for it, and it can do them damage. So they have to be published in a relatively straightforward way, without the kind of hype that will call down the wrath of God on them."

"That means you have to publish new writers with as much care as those at the top of the list. You can't really spend the money in terms of consumer advertising, but you can send the books out for advance quotes, and do all the little things to make sure that by the time somebody gets published people know a bit about who they are. Where we are lucky is that we have the science-fiction press – *Interzone*, *Vector*, *Locus* and so on – to do that. It's not so easy in a genre like crime. I'm not sure it has that same coming-together of professionals and fans yet."

Terry Maher, who owns the Pentos Group – including the Dillons chain – recently described the Net Book Agreement as "The book trade's Berlin wall," and promised to challenge it. Evans believes this would be detrimental. "I certainly think it will do no good to the small independent bookseller, although the specialists will probably cope with it."

"If you go into the big New York bookstores you see bestselling titles remaindered. They are discounted from day one in the States. One of the reasons for the hardback boom there was that people weren't prepared to pay full retail prices, but they wanted the new Stephen King or whatever, and they wanted it the day it was published. That's led to huge problems, because once you start merchandising hardbacks the same way as paperbacks, you're going to get paperback returns. And mistakes are made with hardbacks; the one that's always quoted is James Clavell's *Whirlwind*. They put out some unbelievable figure, but got over fifty per cent returns; and you're talking about a seventeen or eighteen dollar book."

Does the proliferation of specialist shops, importing American editions, cause problems for UK publishers? "Yes, I think it does, increasingly. It was less of a worry when we were doing print-runs of 10,000. Now, with runs of five or six thousand, and all the specialist shops between them bringing in maybe a thousand copies, that's twenty per cent of your potential readership gone."

"American agents and publishers have been in the habit of submitting things to British publishers at finished copy stage. Now it's getting to the point where I'm saying, unless the circumstances are exceptional, I'm not interested at finished copy stage. It's too late. I want to see books at manuscript stage, so we can be in the shops at the same time as the Americans. I think more people are going to be saying that. It's a dilemma because all of us like working with the specialists, and they are very important, which I think is why nobody has ever tried to do anything about it. But the only way we can deal with this is at our end,

rather than trying to get heavy with the shops. We have to get the books out in time in order for it not to be a problem."

The experience at Gollancz, too, is that fantasy appears to have a livelier market presence at the moment. "Fantasy has been outselling hard science fiction for nearly ten years now, and that may be due to some extent to the creation of an entirely new readership, which started in the sixties and has been building-up ever since.

"But I think a lot of fantasy is wallpaper. It doesn't apply to the best fantasy, but it applies to too much of the rest of it. Whereas if you go to a good sf writer like Greg Bear or Paul McAuley you've got to put something into it yourself. You can't just sit there, switch your brain off, and let pretty pictures march past."

The disappointing performance of anthologies and collections is also common to Gollancz. "Having said that, I'm at the moment in discussions about starting a new anthology series. David Garnett came to me about *Zenith* when Orbit decided they couldn't continue with it. I wanted to find a way of doing it, because I thought it was important that it carried on. So I was looking at that when Dave came to me and said, 'Mike Moorcock has asked me whether I'd be interested in relaunching *New Worlds*.' And that is basically the idea. *Zenith* will be incorporated in *New Worlds*. Mike is providing an introduction, and will write stories for it. The content will be a combination of big-name authors and new writers, so it's going to remain as a forum for fresh talent. We're hoping to launch next August, and to do it every nine months, because an annual isn't quite often enough. I'm very excited about this."

Does he remain equally excited about the genre as a whole? "Obviously to an extent you do read too much of it, so I try to read outside the field if I can, because I think it's important to get away from science fiction. But when something really good comes along, you feel that shiver down your spine, and remember why you're a devotee of the stuff."

Caroline Oakley entered publishing as secretary to Grafton's Editorial Director, on the hardcover side, and became an assistant editor there. She left to spend six months with W.H. Allen, before being offered a job as general fiction editor with **Headline**, where her responsibilities include sf and fantasy.

Oakley was drawn into the field via an early interest in science. "Until the Apollo landings on the moon we had no telly, so my Dad bought one specially, and we were dragged downstairs at all hours of the night to watch this, and it just fired my imagination. And at primary school in the sixties

all our houses were named after spacecraft. Mine was Apollo; the others were Sputnik, Vostok and Mercury.

"It was space exploration, really, that first intrigued me, although I'd always read imaginative fiction as well; C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books for example. So the fantasy aspect has been there for a long time too."

Headline's response to the shrinking mid-list is to bring out a new line. "In January we are launching a list called Headline Feature, and part of the reason is because areas like science fiction are generally seen to be mid-list, simply because they have a slightly smaller audience than other types of fiction. Feature is going to place particular emphasis on science fiction, fantasy, horror, action adventures and thrillers.

"Part of the point of Headline Feature is, yes, we have people like Dan Simmons and Dean Koontz, who are super-sellers, but it also means we can



Caroline Oakley

give authors like Jenny Jones, who's one of our new finds, lead title status. If she was on a large general list, with anything from fifteen to twenty titles a month, she's going to get lost. With Feature, which has four titles a month, she'll be lead mass-market paperback within that month. So hopefully what we're doing is providing more lead slots for science fiction and fantasy writers who would otherwise not get as much coverage as they deserve.

"There is still this awful resistance from the trade if you don't stick something in a category so that they know which shelf to stand the wretched thing on. The retail end is what can make things difficult when they don't really need to be. I'm not saying they are mindless; they're just making their job easier for themselves.

"An obstacle as far as the general

public are concerned is that sf is a lot of the time seen to appeal to the fan with a capital 'F'. You know, they're not writing it for me or you, they're writing it for the fan who walks around with his anorak and his carrier bag and goes to all the conventions. Which is ridiculous, but probably still slightly valid. Many of my friends and acquaintances say they don't like science fiction, but often change their minds when they actually read something good. People seem to have this mind block against it, some kind of in-built prejudice.

"Our intention is to get really good, top-class science fiction and fantasy, and to get as many big names as we can. But also to get them as early as we can. So we keep our eyes and ears open, particularly on the British front.

"I suppose a lot of science fiction is US originated, and the cutting-edge is seen to come from there still, even though that's not necessarily true any longer. We are more than open to new British people, and certainly, if they're good enough, it's not a disadvantage to come in unsolicited; everything that comes in here is looked at. We're as keen as anyone to find the next Asimov or Aldiss. Contrary to the belief of some aspiring writers we are not just here to open envelopes and send their manuscripts back."

A common reason manuscripts are sent back is because of length. "We get a lot of very short books, say between fifty and seventy thousand words, which for Headline's purposes would be a bit slim," Oakley points out. "When the company started there were a lot of series of American books taken on which were short – say 192 finished pages – and those series tended to start well, but tailed-off terribly. America seems to like short books in big series. But it appears the UK market is looking for lot shorter series and lot fatter books. Ideally at least 256 finished pages; and if it's a good table-leg proper-upper of 500 pages plus, then all the better. Maybe that's a cultural difference between here and the States.

"Horror is an area where we would be happy to find new talent. We do quite a lot, and have three names who are real market leaders in Dean Koontz, Richard Laymon and now Dan Simmons. But also we have one or two newer people who are hopefully going to be the Koontzs and Laymons of next year or the year after. There's Steve Harris, who was picked up unagented. He's in his early thirties, and had loads of rejection letters before we took him on. But he's now getting a fantastic response, and has done something like 7,500 copies in hardback of his first novel, which is terrific. So we're open to new horror writers. But I would say that one thing we don't want is 'slasher'

novels. Let's have fear, not emetics, that's my feeling. I want to be frightened, not made to vomit; if I wanted to see buckets of blood I'd go to a pig-sticking."

Science fiction has proved more problematic. "Ever since I've been here, not having read any decent hard sf for ages, I thought it would be nice to take some on. I've found it very difficult to find any, and my pet theory is that this is because there haven't been any great leaps forward in the field of science; apart from people like Hawking, who are dealing very much with theoretical possibilities, not things you can see any concrete evidence of on a level the public has access to. I think that's probably part of the problem."

Isn't it the science-fiction writer's function to be presenting those possibilities? "I'm sure it is, and that's what I've been keeping an eye out for. My impression is that people just aren't writing so much of it any more. The question is why they aren't doing that. Maybe the people who used to write that sort of thing are doing something different now, like making videos. Maybe they are writing computer programmes, because that takes the same kind of logical, inquiring mind, and it's creative."

"On a general level it's probably true that younger readers aren't as attracted to sf as much as they are to fantasy and horror. It could be that the sf readership is an ageing readership, because the space generation is my generation, and I'm probably at the tail-end of it at that. The kids all appear to be Turtle maniacs these days. Of course they might get into the literature via the role-playing stuff, which means they tend to gravitate towards the fantasy side of it. And a lot of it has to do with what I said about the lack of hard sf."

"I grew up in a very small, very insular place, and there weren't that many people around you would call soul-mates. So you looked for stimulation and escape somewhere else. For me it was inner space. Science fiction was something totally different, which had endless possibilities for speculation and imagination. An escape really from the everyday and the humdrum."

Mark and Julia Smith edit fantasy and science fiction for **Transworld's** Corgi and Bantam. Mark joined the company from university seventeen years ago, and apart from a

year off to travel, has been there ever since. Julia came in about ten years ago, initially as assistant to the Publicity Director, but soon moved to an editorial position. The couple also collaborate on fantasy novels, writing as "Jonathan Wylie."

The Smiths are married, they write together and work together – they even have adjoining offices and share an assistant – so it seems superfluous to ask if they have an enduring relationship. "You couldn't really spend much more time together than we do," Mark admits. "It's not a situation we would recommend to everybody. All I can say is that, for whatever reason, it certainly works for us."

Julia began reading fantasy and sf in her teens, whereas Mark didn't read a great deal at that time. "I wish now that I had, but my interest really started at university, where I discovered people like Mervyn Peake and Tolkien. The move into publishing didn't come specifically through that side of things,



Julia and Mark Smith (Photo credit: Dick Jude)

but my interest stayed with me, and in the last few years, since I've been directly involved, there's been more emphasis put on it."

Their writing career began with a fantasy trilogy. "We followed that with another, *The Unbalanced Earth*, which took all of the characters from the original trilogy," Julia says. "After those we wrote a great doorstop of a fantasy, which Corgi are publishing next August, called *Dream Weaver*. I think now we're getting away from trilogies and wanting to write one-offs."

"We started off in a fairly light-hearted vein," Mark adds. "We had been reading a lot of fantasy, and eventually got to the point where we said, 'Why don't we have a go at this?' We both harboured ambitions to write before we were together, but neither of us had produced anything even vaguely proficient."

"What we were doing was taking ideas that cropped up in quite a lot of fantasy and trying to turn them on their heads. Because they were stock situations they were ripe for a certain amount of humorous treatment. We quickly discovered that this was a great deal of fun, and it's remained a great deal of fun. What we didn't realize of course was how much hard work it involved."

"There are a lot of fantasy novels which reviewers in particular complain are all the same, and there's a certain amount of justification in that. On the other hand the basic framework of most fantasy leaves so much scope for individual expression it doesn't mean the overall form is invalid. You can still use that form."

"Basically we wanted to write something we would like to read. The first one had kings, swords and dragons, so in a lot of respects the elements were fairly traditional, but I hope that we, as 'Jonathan Wylie,' have a sufficiently individual voice to make it worthwhile."

Their own writing experience makes them more amenable to new writers. Julia, who deals with the slush pile, is particularly sympathetic. "Since we've been writing ourselves this is something I feel quite strongly about. A manuscript can be absolute garbage, and I still want to write this person a letter to say they've done a terrific job, simply because they've managed to finish it. I know how long they spent, and the blood, sweat and tears that went into it. I feel upset sometimes having to turn people's work down because I know what it would be like if I'd sent my stuff in after spending all those months working on it. So it does give you a sympathetic outlook. You'd like to send them a three-page editorial critique, but we're looking at between seven hundred and a thousand submissions a year, and you don't have the time to do that."

"You have to temper that sympathy with commercial professionalism," Mark interjects, "in that we are a business enterprise. Transworld is here because it makes money. The few openings we have for books to break into the list means you have to be hard-hearted sometimes."

Julia contends that something exceptional will always find a place on their list. "If your schedules are fairly full but you feel strongly about a book you'll find room for it. I always

try to recommend that promising writers go to an agent, because their submissions are taken that much more seriously, and given a bit more time and consideration than if they just come in on the slush pile. If the work has quality, an agent is going to take it up."

Mark feels it is difficult to generalize, but points to a common reason for rejection. "So many books start with several pages of exactly where somebody is, how they got there, and what they had for breakfast. If you don't engage your reader's attention immediately there's every chance you're going to lose them completely. Certainly from the publisher's point of view something that comes in with a bang is much more likely to encourage you to read a bit further to see if it lives up to that promise."

"Dialogue and characterization are things people seem to have an awful lot of problems with," Julia says, "and writers in the slush pile tend to say, 'This is the first in a proposed series.' I think the majority of them are like that, and it does make your heart sink a little bit. Why not just start with a one-off?"

"Part of our job as editors," says Mark, "is to convince the other people in this building who are not editors – the salesmen and accountants – that

the end product we have faith in is going to be good for them too. Where you have to put your own enthusiasm, and if you like your credibility, on the line is when you want to introduce somebody new who doesn't have a track record. But that's where it becomes more fun in a way."

He explains why the emphasis at Corgi these days is more on fantasy. "We got into sf in quite a big way in the seventies, with our 'Collector's Library' series of classics, which were very successful for a while, but gradually died away. When that happened the company interest in science fiction began to lessen. We still do some sf, of course, but it's very much toe in the water rather than mainstream. Fantasy certainly sells much better than science fiction; it has obviously hit a popular nerve and does seem to become addictive."

"One of the things we like about fantasy as opposed to science fiction – and this is talking in very broad terms because the gap between the two has become terribly vague anyway – is that fantasy seems so much more concerned with people, with characters; whereas science fiction tends to be concerned with hardware and technology."

"Transworld is experiencing problems with what is commonly called the

mid-list the same as everybody else, and it's becoming more difficult to justify publication of certain titles. But I think fantasy and science fiction has more or less managed to side-step that with us. To a certain extent – we are not immune totally."

"We don't put the science fiction and fantasy in what we call the mid-list," Julia reminds us. "They are either new titles or category fiction. I think the reputation of the list is good enough with booksellers that they won't treat them as mid-list. And generally the list has done very well. The owners regard it as a nice little earner."

• Space limitations mean the interviews in this series do not represent the views of all the British science-fiction editors. Apologies to those who had to be left out on this occasion.

(Stan Nicholls)

Note: we shall be commissioning Stan Nicholls to do a similar collective interview of the crime and mystery-fiction editors, to appear in Interzone's new sister magazine, Million.

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Hands

Neil Jones

The three metal fingers of the Hand hang poised above the control-stick of the sled, gleaming like silver claws in the sunlight, droplets of seawater rolling off them. Marius lies very still in the water, his long grey dolphin body alongside the sled, his other Hand, the left, clamped firmly to the grip beside the control panel, anchoring him.

The sled rocks gently, straining at the cables that moor it to the work-platform that is moored in turn to the *Espérance*. The Pacific is shimmering, calm; there's a salt smell in the air. Almost, if you didn't know otherwise, you could believe that all was well with the planet.

Breathing as softly as I can, willing Marius to succeed, I wait.

Very slowly then, the Hand begins to descend. Millimetre by millimetre, down through the bright air. Until the fingers are positioned around the control stick. His grey flank ripples as he flexes his right flipper; the harness just forward of it picks up the motion and sends electronic signals up through the circuitry of the Arm. Gently, the fingers begin to close.

"You've got it," I murmur encouragingly in half-talk. The perpetually cheerful grin he wears doesn't deceive me. His dark eyes are full of concentration, his body tense. I've never seen him like this before.

The platform rocks slightly as someone steps down from the stairway and out onto it. I know who it is from the brisk, assured sound of the footsteps: Jean-Claude Fournier, Océanique's man-in-charge. Why can't he let us be until his company's damned test is underway?

He comes up to the edge of the platform, level with me and to my right. Out of the corner of my eye I see his eyes flick along the lines of my wet-suited body, to my legs, my hips and my breasts, then linger for a second or so, before shifting back again to Marius.

Not wanting to, I turn, summon a half-smile, a quirk of the lips, and gesture towards Marius, at the Hand still poised over the stick, the fingers silver in the sunlight. "Final check of the recalibration," I whisper. Diplomacy done, I turn away again.

The Hand creaks as Marius begins to swivel it. Too fast; the fingers begin to lose their grip. The stick is sliding free.

The fingers jerk open and then immediately click shut as Marius tries to regain the grip. But he has misjudged it. The fingers miss the stick completely, and the Hand slews downward to gouge a long deep scratch into the orange paintwork of the sled.

Marius squeaks in frustration: *Shark-shit*. The right Hand flails the air, rocking the sled. With a snap, the left Hand opens and then Marius is gone under the water.

What's wrong with him? I know how much this test means to him. But this is so unlike him; much too human a reaction. Fournier's arrival? I wonder, knowing Marius dislikes the man, and sharing the feeling.

"It all checks out," I say, turning to Fournier, trying to sound casual. "He's just a little nervous."

Fournier has his lips pursed and his brow furrowed in a textbook illustration of doubt. "Of course, Greta," he says, in his clear, too precise English.

"He'll be fine when he gets down there. Really," I say, despising myself for the tone I hear in my voice.

Fournier glances down at the water, at the ripples Marius has left behind him, frowns. "We are ready to begin."

"Fine. We're ready too."

Fournier is turning away but there is something in his eyes, something he has all ready to say. As if it has only just occurred to him, he looks back at me and says, "Greta. While the test is underway, we'd like you to remain aboard the *Espérance*."

"But," I finally get out, "I'm taking the sled down. Everything's all set up." And I'm ready for the dive. Why else would I standing here in this wetsuit with a shipful of sailors staring down at me?

He gives me a flash of white film-star teeth, his sympathetic look; he's used it before. "Both Strasbourg and Cincinnati have insisted. I am sorry. I told them it was not necessary." He spreads his hands. "But they'd prefer it if you stay up top."

"What the hell do they think I'm going to do down there? You've got your monitors. You're going to follow every move Marius makes. There's no way we can cheat."

"It's not that, Greta. But a lot depends on this test. We have to be absolutely sure of what Marius is capable of."

"And if I say no?"

He shrugs, his blue eyes stony behind the polite, patient expression. "Then I am afraid that we must call the test off."

"And we can kiss goodbye to the funding?"

"Yes."

With the entire ecology of the planet unraveling around us, a research program like Project Hands is at the bottom of everyone's list when it comes to handing out government money. Océanique's offer has come just when we most need

it. But, even from when Fournier first approached us, I've felt we'd be a lot better off without them – without the strings they would attach to the Hands, to Marius.

Now all the anger I've been bottling up ever since this whole thing started comes to the surface. And then, just as I'm about to tell Fournier exactly what I think of him – and of his damned company, a Donald Duck voice calls out, Greta.

I turn. Marius is there, grey head poking out of the water, the Hands folded to his sides. He's giving me a stony stare of his own. It's taken years but I think I can read something of what's in a dolphin's eyes. Not much perhaps, but more than I can read in most people's.

Greta, he pipes. *You stay on the surface. That's OK.*

"It's not OK," I say.

Greta. *Please.*

He doesn't need to say any more. We're going through with this because Marius has insisted.

Marius.

The rain-forests almost gone, the ozone layer in shreds, the continents polluted and the oceans halfway down the same road – the whole planet teetering on the brink of a catastrophic climatic change as we drift out into a new century, a new millennium. But all that matters to me right now is Marius.

If he fails the test, if Océanique won't give us the funding we need, what will he do then? Give up. Leave the Project? Leave me? Furious, with Marius, with Fournier, and somehow, most of all, with myself, I say nothing.

Marius glides back in to the edge of the platform, directly in front of Fournier, lifts his head out of the water and says to the man, *I'm ready.*

Fournier nods his head. He can only speak a few words of half-talk but his understanding is surprisingly good. "That's fine, Marius," he says in English, sounding as if he is speaking to a five-year old child. "You know what to do?"

I know, Marius says.

"You're sure?" says Fournier. And incredibly he turns to me, as if I am Marius's trainer. Embarrassed, angry, I look down at the water.

Yes, replies Marius.

"Well then," Fournier says, smiling. "Good luck."

It's ridiculous that so much should rest on such a pointless test – of Marius, his intelligence, and his use of the Hands. Swim out to the designated spot, three miles out from shore. Dive down to the bottom, find the torpedo-shaped object placed there – the object that Fournier and his team insist on calling the Target – use the Hands to retrieve it, and bring it back to the *Espérance*.

That's it. The kind of test you'd give a trained animal, not a *tursiops* dolphin – a species whose members have unequivocally demonstrated an intelligence at least equal that of a human being's. At least.

Pointless. Marius has already done things far more complicated than this that I have recorded on film. But Océanique won't accept my research work as proof. They insist on "independent verification."

I want to get down into the water with Marius, pat that glossy flank, give him one last hug for luck and tell him not to worry if it all goes wrong – that we'll get by somehow. But with Fournier here, with almost the entire complement of the *Espérance* lining the rail, I find, after all, that I'm too embarrassed.

Instead, disguising the gesture so that only Marius will know what it is, I blow him a kiss.

Marius lifts out of the water and rolls his head in an answering movement, fluting, *Wish me luck, Greta*. Then, with a quick twist, he is away, the sunlight streaking the long sleek grey body. Moving slowly because of the Hands folded at his sides. Heading out to sea, for the Target.

Beside me, Fournier gestures at the stairway. "Shall we go then, Greta?"

Fournier. There's something about him that I can't pin down; an excitement, an elation. This last-minute decision to keep me aboard. Why did he wait until the test was about to start before telling me? An uneasy feeling: what is it that Fournier knows that I don't?

Blue sky, sunlight on mirror-bright sea, the air warm with a soft, refreshing breeze. And, far off to my left as I go up the stairway, I can see a ribbon of land: Maui. With binoculars I could just pick out the Station: Home. So why do I feel this sudden sense of foreboding, deep and dreadful?

As we reach the deck, I start towards the Monitor Room, but Fournier puts a hand on my arm. "You'll find coffee in the wardroom, Greta," he says pointedly.

"I want to watch."

"I'm sorry." The easy smile again. "Once again, the company insists. Security."

It's a convenient excuse. Except that I've already been inside the Monitor Room and seen the equipment in it. That's not what they want to hide. Something is wrong. Very wrong.

Two of the men at the rail have moved to stand on either side of me. Not sailors. The shoulder patches on their uniforms – and the weapons on their belts – mark them as Océanique corporate warriors.

I feel anger; somehow Océanique is shafting us, shafting Marius. But there's another feeling, an old feeling, crowding that out now: fear. But this time it's not myself I'm scared for, it's Marius.

I want to smash something into Fournier's bland face. Instead, I sigh: surrender. "All right," I say. I even give him an obliging smile. "I guess coffee sounds good. You'll – keep me informed?"

A swift, bright flash of teeth. "Of course, Greta."

He turns away, already dismissing me from his mind: I'm only a scientist, after all. The woman who talks to dolphins. As one of my escorts gestures towards the wardroom, Fournier moves off towards the bow of the ship, to the cabin where his monitors are set up.

I stare down into thick, dark coffee and try to think. There are fragments of a story I've heard the dolphins tell each other – in truetalk, when they think humans aren't around. Of a ship, the Dark Ship. Dark stories of its passage across the roof of their world. I've never made the connection until right now. But suddenly I wonder: the *Espérance*?

I sip the coffee and tell myself the idea is absurd. Marius would have known. Then I recall those times I've tried to discuss the Dark Ship with him. Just blurred history from the long-ago, Greta, he told me. Part of our mythology. Ignore. And I have, right up until now.

Marius. It's Marius who has insisted that we accept Océanique's offer, Marius who'll have to work for them if the test is successful. Marius who wants their damned money.

The Hands – miracles of technology, and already out-of-date. Based on equipment designed for human prosthesis, crude compared to what could be produced if only we had more money.

And Océanique, a newly-formed Euro-American joint venture, are offering us – offering Marius – the money we need in return for Marius's future participation in their "Ocean-Resource Development Program." Provided Marius can first prove his usefulness by passing this test.

With Océanique's money Marius could have Hands with close to human precision, human sensitivity. He could paint, could sculpt, could – I realize that I still don't really know what it is he wants to do with them.

Better Hands. How desperately does Marius want them? I wonder. Enough to close his mind to the sounds I'm hearing now – the sounds of danger?

The sharp smell of coffee. The only thing I know for sure is that something is wrong. All my instincts tell me Marius is swimming into danger out there. Two choices, I think. Go straight for the sled and follow Marius out to the Target. Or get into the Monitor Room and try to find out what is going on, try to stop it.

Whatever I do it has to be now.

And I decide.

I put down my coffee-cup, politely ask one of my escorts for directions to the head and start off hesitantly towards it.

I turn a corner and I'm out of sight. Then I'm running for the Monitor Room.

In seven years of working with dolphins, the last four on Project Hands, I've never known one remotely like Marius.

The Pacific dolphins had spread the word about the Project. And after three years of working with cheerfully clumsy cetaceans, three years of failure, of despair, of getting ready to give up, one bright Pacific morning, almost a year ago to the day, Marius came into the Station.

Marius is the only dolphin who has ever shown any real interest in the Hands, the only one who was willing to work with them. Not just eager to try them out of curiosity, or willing to continue using them for a few days – even weeks – out of a dolphin desire to please. No, he wants to wear them.

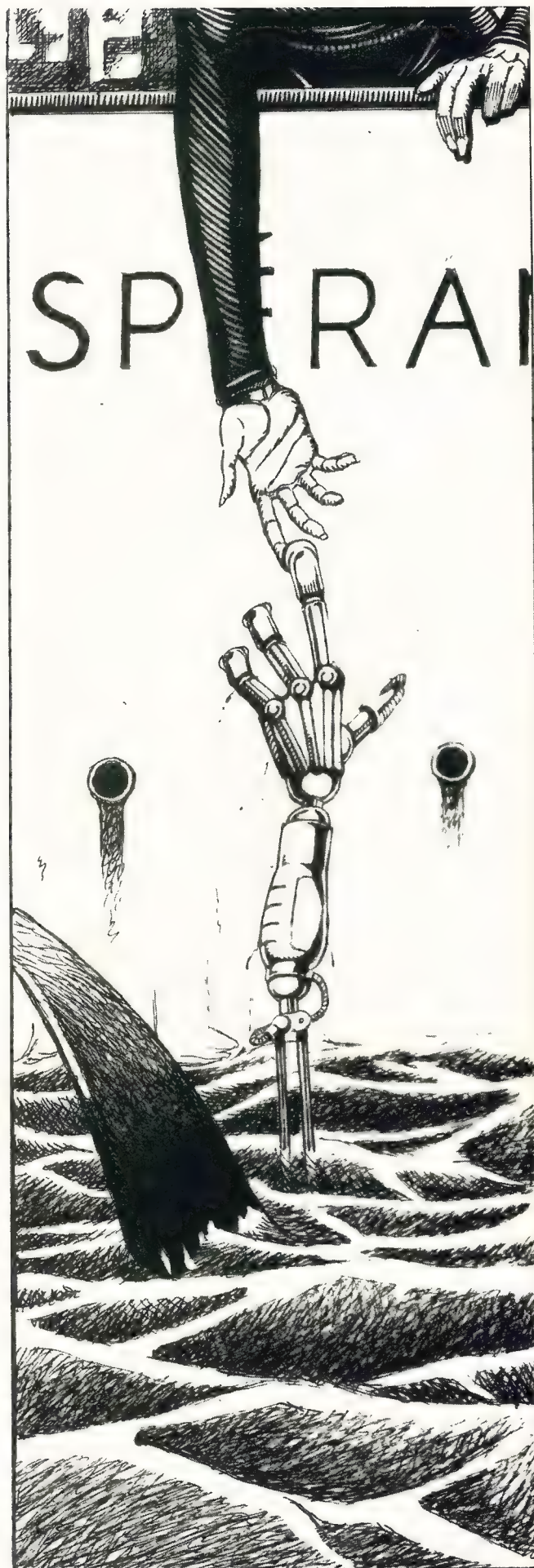
I've never truly understood why.

And he's so damned good with them. So damned talented. Far and away the best who's ever used them.

Marius is special. In all my official reports, I've recorded his species as *tursiops truncatus*, common bottlenose dolphin, and he could just about pass for one. But the truth is I don't know what he is. I suspect he's a crossbreed, that his genetic history would give us biologists quite a few surprises.

Dolphins have been evolving for millions of years. Slowly, gracefully, unhurriedly. So, if Marius is more than a freak, if he's the first of a new breed of dolphin – and I believe that he is, that there are more like him turning up here and there across the world – then there has to be a reason for his kind appearing now.

Perhaps it's us. Humans have fouled the land so



Illustrations by Martin Perrott

completely, come so damned close to doing the same to the oceans, pushed the whole planet half-over the edge. Perhaps we've triggered something amongst the dolphins.

Something. Working with dolphins I've heard truetalk rumours of what for want of a better name – for want of any name – I've called the Shadow Council. A dolphin decision-making body? Did it decree Marius's birth, send him to learn the use of the Hands, to find the shape of human thoughts?

Speculation. But Marius was already fluent in half-talk when he came in to the Station.

The Monitor Room is not guarded. But why should it be? The *Espérance* is a company-owned vessel, Océanique's territory. Everyone aboard except me has been security-cleared.

I go straight to the door and press my ear against the metal. I can hear the muffled sound of male voices, talking in English, but I can't make out the meaning.

There's no time now to play it safe; it can only be a matter of minutes at most before my two guards back in the wardroom start to wonder where I've got to. As silently as I can, I open the door a fraction, just enough so that I can peer round it.

There are radar and sonar screens and God knows what else along one wall. Even cameras – they've got them fixed to buoys out near the Target. Fournier wants a record. Two men, the rest of Fournier's little team, I can't remember their names right now, are sitting in front of them; Fournier is standing immediately behind them, his hands on the backs of their chairs. All three of them, thank God, have their backs to the door.

One of the men, bald-headed, sleeves rolled up on muscular arms, is prodding a finger at a screen. "That dolphin's making good time."

Fournier nods. Bending over the other man's shoulder, he peers at the adjacent screen, a TV monitor; I glimpse a grainy side-view image. Strange sounds from the speaker.

The pale thin face of the second man squints up at him. He's wearing headphones. "Impatient. Eager to get going. Very eager."

"All right," Fournier says. "Launch."

Pushing the door all the way open, I go in just as the pale-faced man leans forward, touches three buttons in succession. A jarring sound reverberates right through the hull, up through the soles of my feet on the deck. It sounds like something opening – far below, in the bowels of the ship.

"It's away," the pale-faced man announces. He points to a corner of his screen. "There."

"It?"

As they turn and see me, surprise spreads all over Fournier's smooth, professionally handsome face. "Greta! What are you doing in here?"

"What the fuck," I ask then, "is going on?"

"Get out of here." Fournier steps forward, but I am faster. I slip past him.

The screens blink up at me, pinging their reassuring lullaby. Out near the Target, approaching it, a steady bleeping motion: Marius. Far away from it, beside the *Espérance*, there is another trace on the screen, bigger, moving away from the ship in a slow, lazy curve. In the same direction Marius has taken.

"What the hell is that?"

"Part of the test, Greta. That's all. Just part of the test."

Fournier's face is full of anger, a great deal of it under a very tight leash. "Now if you will just go back to the wardroom."

I'm trying to understand this and I simply cannot. But, most of all, I can't understand why.

Crops are failing on the land. And behind the governmental reassurances, famine is looming. The oceans have been hurt too, but, despite everything we've done to them, there are still fish, squid, krill, plankton, seaweeds: food.

Jean-Claude Fournier had talked convincingly of Océanique's plans for exploiting those resources. And he'd been disarmingly frank. Océanique was only one of the many companies driven back to the seas in search of survival and profit. Océanique wanted an edge. And Marius – and the Hands – might be that edge. Fournier had talked of Handed dolphins working alongside humans harvesting the oceans. Of partnership.

Somehow, in a matter of minutes all that has slid away and I'm into a nightmare. Almost I think that I am dreaming this, that it cannot really be happening. Or have I just – somehow – got it all ridiculously wrong?

I look into Fournier's eyes: cold eyes masking a cold mind. And I know I've got nothing wrong.

"What the hell are you testing? Not Marius." Knowledge clicks home in my brain and I stab a finger at the blip that's moving towards the Target, towards Marius. "You're testing that."

No one answers, no one needs to answer. And the thought comes: the *Dark Ship*. In a choked whisper, feeling very, very scared, I say again, "What – is – it?"

"Greta, you'll have to –"

Absurdly, my mind spinning, I find myself shouting, "It's Doctor Munroe, you bastard."

Fournier stares at me. After a moment, he says, "All right. Doctor Munroe, let me remind you that you're bound by the contract you signed –"

I tell him what he can do with his contract and with his whole damned company. On the screen, the second trace is well clear of the *Espérance* now.

"What," I say, willing the thing to turn away, "what happens when it gets there? To Marius."

Fournier's face is carefully blank, but out of the corner of my eyes I catch sight of the other two men exchanging looks. A chill goes right through me. It's death I'm reading on their faces; Marius's death.

Silence. A long, deathly silence.

"Please god," somebody says. It's a woman's voice, so it can only be me. "Are you all mad? Doesn't Marius mean anything to –" I shake my head, the answer is written all over Fournier's face. "But the Hands, surely –"

"The Hands?" Fournier says abruptly. "What use are they? What can your one tame dolphin do that a trained diver can't?"

"Then why?" I say, finding it difficult to get the words out. "What do you want with Marius?"

"Doctor Munroe," he continues stiffly, aware that he's said too much, "there's more at stake here than just one dolphin. Far more. It's a question of survival for the entire world."

I've heard enough; it's the somebody-else-must-sacrifice speech. "I'm going out there," I say abruptly, turning.

As I reach the door I feel a man's hands on me, pulling me roughly back: Fournier. "I cannot allow that, Doctor."

Marius, I think, as I try to wrench my arms free. Got to get to Marius. But his grip is too strong. I'm pinned against his chest. Scent of sharp male sweat in my nostrils.

But I've been here before. This time I know what to do. Letting myself go limp, I turn my head to look up at him, trying desperately for once in my life to look soft and vulnerable. "Please," I say then. "What is it? Some sort of machine? What's it supposed to do?"

Fournier says, "You don't need to know, Greta." He's dragging me round, forcing me back into the room. I turn, still pressed against him, and bring my knee up, very hard, into his groin. A satisfying pulpy sensation. His lips fly apart, he cries out, the cool bland expression splinters. And his hands spring open.

Then I am through the door and slamming it behind me. Running for the side of the ship, for the sled. No time for the steps. Blue Pacific sky above shimmering blue mask of the Pacific. Water gleaming at me, as blank and as ruthless as Fournier's smile. There's shouting from behind me. I jump.

I hit the water, surface and stroke for the sled. Above me, at the rail, I glimpse Fournier, bent over, face contorted, one hand pressed to his crotch. He's shouting something to the crew.

I pull myself up onto the sled in a wash of water. Mask and flippers in the compartment, full oxygen tanks. Just get unmoored from the platform, get it started, get it moving, get out there.

A shout from the rail. One of the men from the Monitor Room, the big bald-headed one, is standing there. There's a gun in his hand.

Hands. Mine are flesh and blood, like the rest of me, not circuitry and metal and plastic. Smooth, sure; there's no hesitation in them now.

I hit the undocking release keys, then the power-and start-keys in swift succession. The mooring cables slip free; the sled starts.

As I gun the sled forward there is a single loud report and something kicks up water to my right. More shouting from the rail. My two guards from the ward-room are there now, sunlight glaring from their drawn weapons.

I ignore them. I ignore everything except the sled. All my fear is out there now, at the Target, with Marius.

Full throttle. Water foams on either side, spray jets up over the shield. More shots. spurts of water from both sides. I find my mask, plug myself into the sled's oxygen tank and begin to submerge, leaving the ship, Fournier, the men, behind me. Heading out towards the Target, out to where the blips are about to meet.

Below the surface is another world, Marius's world. I flip on the sled-scanner. Two traces: Marius, almost at the Target. And the other, only halfway there, but well ahead of me, moving

steadily. Whatever it is, its timing is perfect: it's going to get there while Marius is still down on the bottom, playing his pantomime games with the Hands.

I angle the sled downwards, deciding that the only chance is to try to pass beneath the thing and get to Marius while he's still down at the Target.

Minutes go by. The sled drives forward, a long low mechanical murmur beneath me. I'm willing it to accelerate beyond its normal steady pace. The engine is audibly straining now, sending vibrations through me, the screw whirring at its maximum. It feels as if we're barely moving.

In my head I'm recalculating speeds and distances over and over, wondering if I can possibly get there before that thing. I've no time for any of the things I'm feeling: the anger, or the fear.

Sunlight percolates through the layers of water, sieved chromatically to a blue dimness. Out of it, silhouetted against the sunlit surface far above, I see a shape ahead of me.

A living shape, not machine. Familiar. White edged with black, stroking confidently forward. The shape is almost that of a tursiops dolphin; but perspective informs me otherwise.

It's big.

Big, powerful. And so very dangerous when it wants to be.

Orcinus orca. Killer whale.

As I pass beneath it, it rolls, spirals down towards me. I remember the harpoon gun then, clipped to the side of the sled, and reach for it. And I slow.

The Orca levels off, paralleling my course, metres away from me. Large, powerful, majestic. Its size alone tells me it is a mature male. It – he – grins across at me, a black face, bibbed with white.

Doc-tor Mun-roe, it calls in half-talk. The voice is so like a dolphin's – so like Marius. Where is he, your tame dolphin?

"Well away from here," I call out then, through my mask-voder.

No. He's out here. I'm going to kill him.

"Why?" I demand. Killer whales sometimes prey on dolphins, but I know this has nothing to do with hunger. "For pity's sake – why?"

I have my mission.

He drifts casually closer to me. And then I see the circuitry stitched into the flanks, braided into the flesh around his eyes. There are metal and plastic plates along his body.

"What are you? What the hell have they done to you?"

Made me more efficient.

Circuitry. Not Hands that can be slid off after an hour or a day. Implanted, linked directly into the pain-and-pleasure centre of the brain. This Orca is half-machine. Not allowed to run the open sea, not yet. Kept aboard the *Espérance* and loosed at intervals to hunt and to kill. And finally, when they've run all their trials, they'll have a design they can put into mass-production.

I shudder with disgust. How could they do this to a living creature like the Orca? How could anyone?

Fournier. The memory of his smiling face appears in front of me; his mellow tones ring in my ears. Survival and profit. In a world where rival companies are virtually at war with each other, the Orca is what

Océanique wants: a programmable killing-machine. A weapon.

But why Marius – and Project Hands? The oceans are full of dolphins for the Orca to hunt. Why has Fournier gone to all the trouble of luring him out here? Not simply another field-test for the Orca, one more sacrifice to the Dark Ship?

Then, looking ahead, I glimpse the first of the carefully positioned cameras, tracking through the water with soulless cybernetic precision. And the last piece of the pattern slides into place.

Fournier is recording this for a reason. Even within companies, there is the struggle for resources: this test has been designed to sell the Orca to Fournier's superiors. In the boardrooms in Strasbourg and Cincinnati, they'll watch the Orca perform – and never realize that Marius never had any chance at all against him. Appearance will count for everything. Océanique wants a weapon, something they can use against their corporate rivals. And Marius's death will be so much more convincing to them than any ordinary dolphin's could ever be: the Hands write humanity all over him.

I feel a sense of helplessness. Even a decade ago, this would surely have been unthinkable. Now, in a world that is becoming more and more desperate by the day, it's become simply a question of what you can get away with. And Fournier can get away with this. Who's going to care what happens to a dolphin? And who's going to listen to me – an obscure research scientist – when a whole ship's complement of Océanique's finest will have a very different story to tell.

The Orca glides along beside me, still matching my course. The harpoon gun. I know what I have to do. And I know I'll never have a better chance.

I bring the gun up. The Orca sees the movement, turns with astonishing speed and comes straight for me. I aim, pray, fire.

The harpoon flies true. The Orca rolls, twists his body. The harpoon glances off a plate on his flank and arcs off into the depths.

Then the Orca is coming towards me, his jaws parting in a vast sharp-toothed grin.

Knowing it's too late, I try to speed up, to turn the sled. The Orca looms over me and I shut my eyes. Fear, and memories of Marius.

I feel teeth grate on the barrel of the harpoon gun. Then it is wrrenched from my hands. When I open my eyes, I see it falling steadily towards the sea bottom. The sled is still rocking from the Orca's passage. I steady it and look around.

The Orca is only a few feet to my right, swimming alongside the sled. He is staring at me out of one dark silver-bracketed eye.

I wonder why I'm still alive. He hasn't killed me – and, as we move closer and closer to the Target, it occurs to me that he isn't going to. Fournier and his team have programmed the Orca to kill Marius. But he can choose what he does with me. And he has chosen to let me live.

Humans have warped his mind and his body. But something cetacean is still alive beneath that state-of-the-art circuitry.

What I feel then, all mixed up together, is relief and something close to gratitude and pity. And a faint flicker of hope. "Listen," I say, "this doesn't have to happen."

Turn around, Doctor Munroe, the Orca responds. Go back to the ship.

"You go back," I call to him. "Tell them you found him, tell them he got away. Tell them anything."

I'll tell them I've killed him, Doctor Munroe. And I will. Turn around.

We're coming right up to the Target now. And there's no more speed to squeeze out of the sled but I try anyway. Frantic now, I scan for Marius: he should be below me.

The Target is there, just as Fournier showed us in the photographs, a cylinder resting on the seabed, its side inscribed with numbers: a decoy. Marius is not beside it.

The Orca is still moving alongside me, unhurried, scanning the water for my Marius. He calls out, You know I'm here, dolphin. Where are you hiding?

And then, dimly, beyond the Target, I see another shape: Marius. Not coming from below, but from the air above. The Hands are folded to his sides, giving him a smooth, streamlined look – deceptively so; the Hands still slow him down. He's moving down towards us. Purposefully, as if he is aware of me, of the Orca.

But he can't be – or else why would he be moving in this direction? Surely he can sonar this creature directly in front of him, the unmistakable shape of a killer whale, a tursiops dolphin's mortal enemy? Then what the hell's he doing? Coming back to rescue me? Or does he still think this is a test that he's got to pass?

The Orca turns his head, sees Marius and lets out a resonant joyous sound of satisfaction. So, little brother. It's good to see you after all, I thought you'd fled.

No, brother, Marius calls back. I am here, as you see. Then he says more, but it's all in pure cetacean truetalk. I can only catch blurred fragments of meaning: brotherhood, unity.

The Orca ignores it. And I wonder, can he understand truetalk any longer? Or have they burned that knowledge out of his brain?

The Orca twists around and launches himself towards Marius. He's so fast, so big. Those teeth. He'll tear Marius apart. I swing the sled around, towards the Orca and aim directly at him. I'm going to ram. I call out to Marius, "Get clear." I gun the sled forward.

Marius acts as if he hasn't heard me and continues his slow, methodical stroke towards us.

The Orca is far too manoeuvrable. As I near him, he rolls easily – contemptuously – aside. I go uselessly past, almost close enough to touch his flank. He calls out to me, jeering, a matador evading a particularly clumsy bull.

Again I start to swing the sled around, still with the same desperate idea of ramming the Orca, knowing that it's hopeless, not knowing what else I can do.

Looking around for Marius then, praying that he's taken the opportunity to free himself of the Hands, to get some distance between himself and the Orca, I see him. He's still coming, Hands still folded back, straight towards the Orca, as if it's another dolphin he's

coming to meet, not a enemy, almost twice his size.

And then, with a kind of horror, I think: *Flow*. Marius has talked to me of this most cetacean of concepts. The sea of life carries you, as it carries all others. And if the currents move you in such a way, bring you to a certain time and a certain place, then... Not fatalism, not at all. Except that here and now the distinction can't make any difference.

The Orca calls out his hunting song, *Come to me, little brother. Feed me*. As if he's running on a shark's program, he rolls over to expose his white underbelly and swims straight at Marius.

I cry out, useless sounds through the mask-voder. If only I had the harpoon gun, anything. But all I have is the sled. It turns slowly; I know I can't get there in time.

Moving at a speed my mind insists is slow motion, the two glide together then intersect. The Orca's bulk blocks my view; Marius is lost behind it.

Slowly, the Orca turns. Marius and the Orca are one, locked together. A black-and-white body biting into a smaller grey one.

Except that the Orca's jaws are still wide open, still straining to close on Marius. Something is gripping them, holding them apart.

Something: the Hands.

The Orca shakes his huge blunt head, trying to free itself. His body whips from side to side, electronic rage harnessed to living muscle. The left Hand maintains its grip on the mouth. But the right Hand shifts and pulls free.

The jaws shut then, biting down hard onto metal. Just as the right Hand, fingers splayed, reaches for the circuitry that patches the head. And with precise, delicate motions, begins to strip it off, piece by piece.

The Orca thrashes like a harpooned shark. Glittering shards of metal and plastic are drifting slowly through the water; lazy tendrils of blood. Sounds are coming from him: rage, pain, nothing coherent.

Then abruptly he stiffens.

They glide through the water then, the two shapes still locked together, one living and one dead. Marius murmurs something in pure dolphin that I do not catch. Then says in half-talk, *Goodbye, brother*.

He flexes and the harness that holds the Hands to his body unclasps. A wriggle and he has slipped free of it.

The Hands maintain their hold on the Orca and, locked in this last embrace, they begin a steady drift downwards.

Golden sand, an empty beach a long way from the *Espérance*. They won't find us, that is if they've even bothered to look. The sand is hot beneath me, the sun is warming. So why am I shivering, my teeth chattering?

Marius is swimming up and down the shoreline restlessly. *It's all over now, Greta*, he squeaks.

"I know it is," I say, wondering which over he is talking about. I hug my knees, just wanting him to go away. Fournier, I remember. There's nothing he – or Océanique – can do to me. Nothing that would make any difference. Marius is another matter. "Just go. Get out of here."

Greta, he calls again, sounding agitated. I can feel his concern. But that doesn't change anything.

I realize that there's something in my hand: a face-mask; it's my own. When I look up again the sea is



staring at me, waves washing in at me, across my bare feet. I fling the mask away from me then as hard as I can, at the sea. At Marius. And helplessly, uncontrollably, I start to sob.

Greta, Greta, Marius is piping. I'm sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.

After a very long time, I wipe at my cheeks with my hands, look up. Marius is still out there. "The Hands," I say. "What did they ever mean to you? Just something to attract Fournier's attention, so that he'd bring you together with the Orca?"

Full of anger, full of hurt, I wait, desperately wanting him to deny it. Wanting it not to be true.

No, he says, and I feel sudden hope. *But that's all they were supposed to mean – a hook for Fournier or someone like him. I'm sorry, Greta.*

Sunlight slanting off Pacific water, sound of surf in my ears. And I think of the Shadow Council, if it truly exists, of – something – that humanity's dirty-fingered fumbling with the planet has finally triggered into action.

"Then it was all planned," I say dully. "From long before you ever came into the Station."

Not the sort of planned you mean, Greta.

And, just for a moment, I gaze across the gulf that divides human and dolphin thought processes and glimpse patterns that primate minds barely register. The Dark Ship is only one manifestation of what has gone so badly wrong with the world. But there are so many others; other things that have to be ended – that Marius might have found himself facing. Just as there are other dolphins like Marius here and there across the world – it could have been any one of them that met the Orca.

"Flow," I say presently.

Yes, he says. *Flow.* His voice is remorseless, like a tide wearing away at the land. *This time and this place. Life chose the Orca. And it chose me.*

Silence for a time; even the sea is silent. Perhaps it's too late to tilt the world back into balance. Perhaps things have already gone much too far. But it comes to me then that what has happened here is only a beginning. That there is a reason for hope. A new type of dolphin. And a new age of the world.

And the only feeling I have left in me is hurt.

Greta, Marius says, *the time we were together was good. I will miss you.*

Out there in the water he is sleek and grey and glossy. And I remember that day, a year ago, when he came into the Station and all the time that has followed. And I too tell the truth: "I'll miss you, Marius. I'll miss you very much." Then I am in the water and hugging him for the last time.

Finally, we move apart, I backwards, onto the land, he towards the open sea. Goodbye, Greta, he calls. *Luck always.* It's a moment before I realize that his very last words to me are in truetalk.

I watch until, finally, he is lost to view. And afterwards, I sit on the sand, still staring out to sea. And, when the sun finally sinks beneath the Pacific horizon, I am still there, alone on the empty beach.

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BACK-ISSUE CLEARANCE SALE!

Issues 1, 5 and 7 of *Interzone* have long been out of print. Recently, issue 17 has run out – and some other numbers are also in short supply. However, we still have an abundance of certain other issues, including some surprisingly early ones. Now, in order to make space for newer magazines, we're having a clear-out of excess stocks. Between now and 1st July 1991, the following back issues are available to inland readers at **just £1 each** (postage included):

Number 2, Summer 1982 – stories by J. G. Ballard, Rachel Pollack, Alex Stewart (his debut) and Andrew Weiner, plus Tom Disch's tribute to the late Philip K. Dick.

Number 3, Autumn 1982 – stories by Nicholas Allan, Angela Carter, David Garnett, Garry Kilworth and Josephine Saxton, plus letters from Michael Moorcock and others.

Number 12, Summer 1985 – stories by Michael Bishop, M. John Harrison, Paul J. McAuley, Richard Kadrey (his debut) and Pamela Zoline, plus book reviews by Mary Gentle and a comic strip.

Number 14, Winter 1985/86 – stories by Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Bruce Sterling, Sue Thomason, Ian Watson and David Zindell, plus a Clive Barker interview and Sterling article.

Number 15, Spring 1986 – stories by John Brosnan, William Gibson, Garry Kilworth, Diana Reed and Steven Widdowson, plus a Bruce Sterling interview, Mary Gentle reviews, etc.

Number 25, Sept/Oct 1988 – stories by Christopher Burns, Peter Garratt, Nicola Griffith, David Langford, Paul Preuss and Ian Watson, plus a Terry Pratchett interview, Tom Disch on Whitley Strieber and much more. *Our first bimonthly issue.*

Number 26, Nov/Dec 1988 – stories by Susan Beeston (her debut), Johnny Black, Eric Brown, Terry Pratchett, Bob Shaw, John Sladek and Charles Stross, plus a Leigh Kennedy interview, Christopher Priest article, etc.

Number 27, Jan/Feb 1989 – stories by Yoshio Aramaki, Barrington Bayley, John Brosnan, Ian Lee (his debut for us), Kim Stanley Robinson and Bob Shaw, plus J. G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies, Kathy Acker and Brian Stableford interviews and more.

All other back-issues (except the out-of-print numbers 1, 5, 7 and 17) cost £2.30 each – or £1.95 each if you buy three or more. **But the eight issues annotated above you may have for just £1 each (£1.20 overseas; \$2 USA).** No extra for postage! Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, UK.

Remember: this offer remains open until 1st July 1991.

Also available: a small handful of copies of *Interzone: The 1st Anthology* (Dent "B" format paperback, 1985, £3.95) at only £2 each, postage included. First come, first served.

Sure, why not. Vive. Vive **The Difference Engine** (Gollancz, £13.95), by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Vive the big book (383 pages), vive the tough job (making London in 1855 worse than it was in fact), vive the good read (because if readers manage to persevere through part one, "First Iteration: The Angel of Goliad," which hovis-fucks its way through Leon Garfield's London Town for a lot more pages than Leon Garfield ever took to set a scene, they won't get stuck further on), vive the collaborative major writer types (artful dodger and bull endomorph) who set such a dish before us. We should feast like kings.

And we do, we read through the night to finish the thing. There is much to intrigue us. There is the iron delirium of the alternate Britain Gibson and Sterling have constructed, an Albert Robida nightmare of Babel in the final iterations of some formula for catastrophic change. There is the storyline, told in the def ex cathedra boom of the bull, but out of the side, as it were, of the mouth of the dodger, so that much of the plot takes place covertly but underlined, as though shouted from around a corner. There is a constant play between our own history and the Gibson-Sterling alternative, between our memories of historical figures (among them Lord Byron, his daughter Ada, Charles Babbage himself, Laurence Oliphant, Benjamin Disraeli, from whose *Sybil* comes much of the remaining cast, Prince Albert, Pierre-Jules-Theophile Gautier) and the uses to which they are turned. There is also an ongoing contrast between "traditional" steampunk nostalgia à la Tim Powers and the detumescent chill of our authors' actual vision of things. And there is the *Difference Engine* itself, an actual computing machine designed by the real Charles Babbage around 1820, which never worked right in our world (and may never have been workable in the real nineteenth-century world, even if Babbage hadn't lost interest in it after a year or so); in the world of *The Difference Engine*, Babbage has of course succeeded in constructing a workable computer, and it is his Engine (one suspects that in fact it's Babbage's later, more sophisticated, but much less appealingly named Analytical Engine that Gibson/Sterling have described) that has generated an alternate version of the world.

By 1830 or so things begin to change. Wellington is assassinated, neatly eliminating from the scene his crushing intelligence, his macabre conservatism. Lord Byron has survived (along with Shelley and Keats) and becomes Prime Minister for the Rad party, the party of progress, Babbage's party. Very soon the face of London begins to convulse into a Freemason's

wetdream; parks and homes are demolished to make way for entrepreneurial edifices decorated with pharaonic runes and dedicated to Progress; new thoroughfares slice through the heart of town; steam gurneys choke the roadways and poison the air; and everywhere one can hear the sound of the new order being born. In common with all utopias run from the centre, this new order will speak with one voice, the voice of mensuration and hierarchy, the voice of the Engine of Thought. By 1855, when the book proper begins, identity cards are universal, and a primitive form of computer virus – it is in fact an iteration of the punched cards which program the machines – will soon be jostling the central Engine into consciousness.

Edward Mallory, one of the several protagonists of the book, whose Hentyesque "manly resolution" in the face of obstacles Gibson and Sterling mock with surprising venom, as though they'd just discovered the Victorian male, and who adheres to a Catastrophist theory of evolution, gets drunk halfway through the book and describes what is happening as "a concatenation of synergistic interactions. The whole system," he adds, "is on the period-doubling route to chaos!" He is, of course, not exactly right (though his version of Catastrophism, which fails ultimately to demonstrate, even to him, that the world is relatively young, does bear a cunning resemblance to the punctuated equilibrium theory with which Stephen Jay Gould has recently attempted to sophisticate the traditional Darwinian model). The system is changing all right, and London, sulphurous and tumid, is a cauldron about to boil. But chaos will not ensue. Like a great kaleidoscope about to shake itself into spyglass fixity, the whole *Difference Engine* world is on the verge of convulsing not into blind chaos but into something clear and dread and crystalline and final, for it is about to become a vehicle for the Eye of Thought, a kind of Crystal Palace cage whose every working is visible to the Engine, to the mad Utopian Eye of the *Difference Engine* conscious and incarnate, tabulator of the quick and the dead. It is for this reason that the epilogue to the book, which is entitled "Modus: The Images Tabled," can stand, with all its kitchen-sink excesses,

as one of the most desolate endings ever affixed to a novel of science fiction.

Unfortunately, the story which leads us more or less in the direction of this ending does so with such an intensity of dither that one is occasionally forced to wonder if the large tale one has attempted to follow is in fact a figment of the imagination, an imposition of conscious structure on what was never meant to be more than a gaminisque romp. First we meet a whore with a heart of gold from *Sybil* and her pimp dandy, but the first disappears to Paris for 300 pages and the other dies in 10. Then we run across Mallory, who rescues a tray of computer cards from Byron's daughter Ada who disappears for 300 pages, and hides them from a crew of dastardly politicals for 300 pages, never seeming to understand that somehow or other these cards contain the releaser that, once "clacked" into the system, will jump the central *Difference Engine*, squatting in the Baroque flywheel hell of inner London, into full consciousness in 300 pages. Most of the book takes place in the wings. There is a lot of action, quite a lot of manly Victorian sex, a *melée* of vignettes, and all while the rough-beast convulsions of the underlying story stink the surrounding air, darken the tone, lead the reader on to a point where the novel – rather than the Engine within it – can be said to become aware of itself.

But this never happens. Any reader familiar with Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus* (1976) should slowly be able to understand that the text of *The Difference Engine* – articulated as it is into a sequence of "iterations" themselves structured as readouts of a visual surveillance of the entire world – is in fact "told" by the Engine itself; that *The Difference Engine* is a set of narrative iterations of the coming to consciousness of the Eye. This can be understood, this can be appreciated. But the novel itself never quite achieves a state where it has earned the meaning it monovocally dispenses, for it never says itself outright; for to speak an argument there must be arguers, and in *The Difference Engine* there is no dialectic, no argument of voices (we verge on Bakhtin here, and will verge off pronto), no protest. There is no

voice conscious of the shape of things, no voice crying No! Only diktat. Therefore the horror of the thing lies inert, in a hell of abandonment, upon the page.

That this is deliberate is perfectly clear, and it is understandable that Gibson/Sterling might wish their novel to contain no centre of consciousness other than that of the Eye which is the book; but somehow, because *The Difference Engine* is a novel, we are left with a sense of failed utterance, of censorship even. Because it is certainly the case that Gibson/Sterling have selected a version of Early Victorian England from which any untoward possibilities of human self-consciousness have been carefully excised. There is no mention, for instance, of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (or of the Crystal Palace at its heart), a vast surreal efflorescent act of obeisance to the God of mechanism, the greatest symbolic event of Victoria's reign, about which much was written at the time, in terms both expressive of the Gibson/Sterling vision and critical of it; even Charles Babbage himself wrote a book about the Exhibition, and its contents might have served sharply to illuminate the kind of mind capable of constructing a Babel in Hyde Park and calling it Progress.

But even more surprising than this is the omission from *The Difference Engine*'s writer-filled pages of one writer in particular, the one novelist, of anyone alive in 1855, who could plausibly be assumed to be capable of understanding the Gibson/Sterling nightmare, and answering back in the voice of a human. I've argued elsewhere, in a brief essay on Tim Powers' *The Anubis Gates* (1983), that the original and onlie begetter of steampunk is in fact Charles Dickens, as dumbed down by Robert Louis Stevenson and Hilaire Belloc and the G. K. Chesterton impostor who thought the only good book Dickens ever wrote was *Pickwick*; but that is by the bye. What is important is that it's Dickens whom Gibson/Sterling leave out, Dickens who knew London in 1855, who knew the feel of the terrible new forces reshaping all of England, who spoke in prodromic passages of unequalled insight of the terminal fevers afflicting the old world (whose ashes we still breathe). They have left out the father. A simulacrum of Dickens in the pages of *The Difference Engine* might have forced Gibson/Sterling to give voice to the horrors they slip between our ribs. As it stands, however, their book is brilliant but smug, deafening but mute. It is an Engine tale.

A few notes.

Brian Stableford's latest novel, *The Werewolves of London* (Simon & Schuster, £14.95), is by far the best book he has ever written, a scientific

romance of very great scope, a discourse about ultimate matters in which human voices are heard to speak and given the dignity to speak at the uttermost pitch of human articulacy about matters vital to human occupancy of flesh and planet, and a knowing traversal of nineteenth-century tropes which never slips, as Gibson/Sterling do, into condescension or the censorship of omission. But there is no way of avoiding the fact that the book stands as the beginning of a trilogy, that its 390 pages do no more than properly introduce the terms of the debate and those characters, human and were and god-shaped, who will conduct it through two volumes to be published later, *The Angel of Pain* and *The Carnival of Destruction*. So we'll be brief, and say little, and urge you to buy. *The Werewolves of London* is perhaps the most intelligent novel yet published in 1990. It is what Brian Stableford amounts to as a writer.

It is 1872. A young man, David Lydyard, is bitten by a serpent south of Egypt and possessed by something like a god, given an inner eye to see the world with, transported back and forth through the fissures of "reality," which turns out to be a frail convention, for the deep reality of the universe is that it is molten, that there is no final respite from the creative world-words of a million billion trillion shape-changing engenderers. Some of them have fallen asleep within the ambages of the crust of the Earth; David's sphinx-god is one of these, awoken by that which Jacob Harkender in England thinks he has himself awoken through pain-dances into a state which allows him to see and voice the universe, invoke it, bring it in some shape to Earth. But the Spider shape which has answered Harkender learns of humanity through Harkender's own psychic deficiencies, and begins to utter itself – through Harkender, and through Lydyard whom it eventually captures as *Werewolves* progresses, and through Lydyard's superbly and courageously rational guardian Talentyre, and through Talentyre's beautiful tough-minded daughter Cordelia, and through young Gabriel Gill who is himself dream-fleshed – and to spin webs of choking semblance. These utterances of the Spider god threaten to dissolve the world, or suffocate it.

The werewolves of London, who have been in town for a long time, for they are of an earlier utterance of reality than people, take part in the elaborate storyline of the book as spoilers, longing, most of them, for a world free of the cold-souled humans who have, like innumerable tiny creatures of the sea secreting coral, somehow managed to fabricate a thin substance of reality around their perception of things, so that the drab consensual world that

humans see has gained a frail but persistent continuity. To shatter this drab web of dumb numbing reality secretions, the werewolves will do almost anything; they will even submit to the awoken Spider whose reality webs dissolve human coral. And so the plot thickens. There are travels beneath the scrim of the world, and much pain, and little resolution. Lydyard and his beloved Cordelia survive, as does Talentyre, and the werewolves. The next volumes will continue the dialectic.

It is, of course, in this quintessential Stableford romance, the dialectic that counts, the incessant conversations which take up the great central section of the book, the trust in the meaning of words, the trust in argument. How do you define a god. How do you recognize the shapes of the risen gods. Is atheism a defence against the horror of a world which can be remade. Is it a good defence, when the universe turns out to be angel-scum, froth torn in a wind of making we cannot see because our souls are cold, our world a terrarium. Buy *The Werewolves of London*. Find out how some things are thought.

Somewhere in the pages of *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's: A Writing Life* (Hodder & Stoughton, £13.95; expanded and limited edition from Avernus, £40.00), Brian Aldiss confesses that he had been finding this public autobiography a very difficult book to write; and no wonder. *Bury My Heart* is the tale of a mask that cannot keep a secret. It is the story of the real Brian W. Aldiss, man and writer, as told by Brian W. Aldiss of Avernus, the figure we see at a distance on television or making a speech, the figure whose privacy we have no reason to wish to penetrate, but who in this instance has taken on the job of trying to blab on the inner man, the real Brian W. Aldiss, who won't come out.

Unsurprisingly, *Bury My Heart* is a rather haunted book. It is full of, and haunted by, things unsaid, tales unfinished or untold, gaps unfilled, connections blocked. The itchy pointillism of its telling gives, in the end, a sense of merited complexity of portrayal, but at the same time the refusal of narrative continuity seems almost punitive, as though the genial Aldiss of Avernus – "the children's eyes / In momentary wonder stare upon / A sixty-year-old smiling public man" – could not entirely disguise the fact that the real self he coats is a person of sustained anger. This is an insight, if it is an insight at all, which *Bury My Heart* is designed to dodge; and more power to it, perhaps. Perhaps it is enough that a number of good stories are told, sometimes all the way through, and that we have in our hands a mosaic of the progress of Brian W. Aldiss through the world to which he has given a great

deal. Vive. *Bury My Heart* at W. H. Smith's is a postprandial masque. As he himself says more than once in these pages, the real Aldiss stares out of the works themselves.

The Monster as Hero

Paul J. McAuley

Where sf writers used to complain that a ton of pulp fantasy was threatening to squash their precious genre as flat as the blade of a magic sword, now horror is their new *bête noire*. Like the Antarctic researchers in *The Thing*, sf writers crouch around their camp fire and eye each other for tendencies to revert into ravening polymorphous creatures or infectious oozing puddles of primordial slime. Into, like, horror writers.

Take Kim Newman, who sprang fully armed from the forehead of *Interzone* with cheerfully nasty stories about cybernetically induced dream fictions, alternative histories starring Elvis Presley, and that cute number about a death-dealing kissogram girl. They felt like sf stories, sort of, but all along Newman had the H-virus in his bloodstream, and slowly he reverted to type. We were uneasy about his first novel, *The Night Mayor*, for instance – a blend of cyberpunk rationale and film noir dreamscape in which after various *Paso atras*, *Muletazos* and *Molinetes*, a monster was hunted down and dispatched. And now we have *Bad Dreams* (Simon & Schuster, £13.95), and the truth is out.

Spun over a single day, it's the story of one of a dwindling band of the Kind, shape-changing near-immortal vampires who feed on human dreamstuff, draining lives and stealing souls. This particular monster is stalking the children of an American Nobel prize-winning playwright whose life he devastated in a previous incarnation as sidekick to Joe McCarthy. And now, in London, he plans to feed on the strong dreamstuff of the playwright's son and two daughters: right at the beginning, we find him banqueting upon the youngest daughter, a junkie prostitute into SM. For the rest of the novel, amid flashbacks neatly detailing his history and widening our perceptions of his powers, he stalks the avant-garde composer son and the other daughter, a journalist who upon learning of her sister's death begins in turn to stalk the monster.

And so, conventionally enough, the threads of the plot tighten towards confrontation; but confrontation is only half the novel. For confrontation precipitates a reality shift, via a charnel house reference to Narnia, into New-

man's patent dreamland, a conjuror's shuffle through alternative lifelines of the heroine hung upon the peg of her playwright father's masterpiece. This is the arena in which the monster must be fought, not in reality but in dreams. And, in another turn of the screw, although we are supposed to side with the brave determined capable (although emotionally cold) heroine, it is really the Monster who is hero.

If Newman's first novel slightly compromised its wonderful film noir consensual reality by a wonky sf rationalization, in *Bad Dreams* he has drawn upon the real world, and specifically upon Soho, with powerful effect. His bang-up-to-date realizations of sex and speciality shops, fast-food joints and private clubs, and of a host of secondary characters (and in particular of a creepily Thatcherite drug pusher), are sharp, fresh, and wittily perceptive. And if the final pages do rather echo the ending of *The Night Mayor* (and, for that matter, of Jack Yeovil's *Drachenfels*), Newman's grip never falters as he propels us down a solidly constructed funhouse ride through a crazy mirrorhouse of puns and allusions.

And leaves the cosy campfire of sf on the far side of the dark horizon.

Likewise set around Soho is Christopher Fowler's *Rune* (Century, £7.50), but this is the Soho of advertising executives and expense accounts, rooted more solidly in history than the neon glitz of *Bad Dreams*, but equally valid. As in *Roofworld*, Fowler's first novel, apocalypse looms. By several ways – that of a librarian who is also a witch; *Roofworld*'s Ealing Comedy detectives, Bryant and May (geddit), who have all the best lines; the hapless hero, connected to the victims of half a dozen of a series of gruesome and bizarre deaths – we enter a conspiracy plot in which the ODEL Corporation plans to dominate its commercial rivals by selective use of runic curses embedded in video-taped sequences. But some of the videos have gone astray, and mayhem follows as the sinister new head of ODEL seeks to limit the damage by laying curses on anyone who may be close to the truth.

It's a head-on collision between an overt homage to M.R. James's "Casting the Runes" and multinational computerized infonets, but where an sf writer would expand upon the uses for Runic technology, Fowler simply slots it into the standard horror plot of Hunt-the-Monster. There's much to admire, particularly the powerful mix of madness and hallucination employed in despatch of *Rune*'s victims, but it's slowed by over-solemn prose, too much talk, and multiple narratives that mostly spin in circles around each other without quite meshing. *Rune* never quite achieves velocity from the gravity well of Hammer Horror clichés.

One reason for horror fiction's proliferation is the major paradigm shift it underwent some fifteen years ago, a regearing for which Stephen King was largely responsible. In horror's last late Edwardian flowering, as in M.R. James's unrivalled canon, evil was like the climate, an unalterable property of the world that surfaced to claim victims who trod too close to its maw, and sank away again to leave survivors grabbing at straws of explanation in its wake. With King came the idea that confrontation of evil could lead not only to its defeat but also to heroic catharsis, and so to redemption and the getting of wisdom. This is not the place to examine the roots of King's tremendous success, but they are clearly to be glimpsed in the four long novellas of *Four Past Midnight* (Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99).

We can see, for instance, that King shares with Steven Spielberg a love of carefully realized small-town American settings, and of competent juvenile protagonists or heroes driven by the violated childhood they have not quite escaped. Add to this a terrific sense of pace and a way of worrying every significant detail from a scene with the urgent tenacity of a terrier going for a rat, and we begin to understand why we are carried along even by carbon-copies of *Twilight Zone* scenarios (a plane lost in another dimension; a camera which takes pictures of another reality, where there are monsters) in a pinball ride from cushion to bumper without let-up in the very best unabashed pop fiction.

What horror fiction would wreak on us, for the central trope of modern horror is humans as prey (and latterly, humans as disease vector), so do we on Nature – as is movingly shown in Garry Kilworth's *Midnight's Sun* (Unwin Hyman, £12.95), a wolf(e) pun in more ways than one. As with the foxes of *Hunter's Moon*, so now with wolves. Which is to say Kilworth eschews easy anthropological whimsy for a hard and realistic exegesis of wolf society and the destruction, inadvertent or not, caused by our presence in the land.

A wolf falls from grace to become pack outcast. He finds a mate and loses her when he is captured by scientists, and is then freed by a helicopter accident and sets out to search for her. And rises by various adventures, including his adoption of the only human survivor of the accident, to become (to his astonishment) both myth and saviour. The story is stubbornly linear, and sometimes a little confused because Kilworth refuses to compromise the viewpoint of his lupine hero. But it is counterpointed with a seamless alternate mythology which levels human importance; and the immediate and

real evocations of landscape, seen from the unfaltering viewpoint of the wolf, show us what we have lost by making Nature into a theme park.

Nature is no more in the disneyland dystopia of Ian McDonald's *Out on Blue Six* (Bantam, £4.99). All of humanity lives in a single vast city in which history has stopped, and where all Pain Crimes are relentlessly erased by the Ministry of Love to keep order. The story is a double helix: a cartoonist makes a single rebellious statement and must flee the bumbling Love police, stumbles into a hidden kingdom, makes a journey to the edge of the world, and returns bearing wisdom; and amnesiac Kilimanjaro West falls in with a troupe of unlicensed artists and slowly discovers his true nature. Both strands wind together, until the gears of the world are stripped bare and history starts again.

There are, of course, innumerable variations on this hoary sci-fi theme, but probably none so baroquely decorated as this. As in *Desolation Road*, McDonald's first novel, there's a colourful tatterdemalion cast, from the King of Nebraska and his court of hardwired raccoons, through Xian Man Ray the Amazing Teleporting Woman, to Kilimanjaro West, innocent messiah. There are densely impacted concatenations of ideas, and gaudy, loony, original visions. And the hyperactive prose won't sit still for an instant, throwing off brilliant verbal fireworks just for the hell of it, sometimes overheating as puns and pop references overload the narrative, and descriptions stripmine the thesaurus to bedrock, but never dull and always cheerful. A fantastical sugary confection, layered deep around an irreducible nugget of stale dystopian tropes, it won't be to everyone's taste, but if nothing else the reader must admire McDonald'schutzpa.

Also noted: Keith L. Justice's *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Reference: An Annotated Bibliography of Works about Literature and Film* (St James Press, £18) is a book about books about books, a guide aimed at librarians who feel the need for a genre reference section but don't know where to start. A useful idea, and usefully divided into categories ranging from Author Studies through Television, Film & Radio to Anthologies, Collections & Annotated Editions, well indexed and with copious lists of core works. Mr Justice deals exhaustively with those volumes which seem to have come his way, but his bibliography is hardly exhaustive, and so full of gaps and padding that one soon begins to doubt its usefulness. As an example, there is an account of George Slusser's (out-of-print) booklet-length treatment of

Samuel R. Delany's early work, but there's no mention of any of Delany's own criticism. Nor is there any mention of Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition*, or Brian Stableford's *Scientific Romance in Britain*, but at some point Mr Justice appears to have collected most of Chris Drumm's booklets, all dutifully noted, though not all essential. Enough. A good idea, but if encountered treat with extreme caution.

(Paul J. McAuley)

A Ballard Reborn Nick Lowe

Throw away your tatty old Panther: J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* is now a large-format, beautifully laid out Re/Search Classic (Re/Search Publications, \$13.99) with new material ranging from the faintly regrettable to the priceless. In category A, Phoebe Gloeckner, a fine comics artist, illustrates with surgical fantasy paintings in a soft airbrush style at strange odds with the text; Ana Barrado's architectural, airport and rocketrange photographs compete unequally with the inevitably more suggestive images evoked by the words; and crazy Bill Burroughs favours us with an unblinking introduction. But the new Ballard matter is vg to mint – though "Four New Stories" is a bit of a cheat, as three are medical *jeux d'esprit* substituting celebrity names for "the patient" in actual plastic-surgery case reports. (The fourth, "The Secret History of World War 3" is a good eighties joke that suffers slightly from juxtaposition with the more obsessive comedy of the sixties pieces, though it's brave to allow the comparison.)

The indispensable thing here is the commentary, some 12,000 all-new words of Ballard's finest essay art: tiny gems of anecdote, explication, wit, observation and polemic strung along the margins like medieval scholia. On its own, this material would easily stand with the very best of Ballard's non-fiction, full of surgically sharp aperçus on the sixties, the eighties, and the post-Kennedy condition. Here, though, it becomes something more than just a Martin Gardner job on a classic text: it genuinely makes a new book of the original, a 1990 Dr Nathan voicing-over the dreams of Ballard's 1967 *Traven*, and reflecting twenty years forward on the mythic convulsions of the sixties that dictated the original text, and the experience of living in a latterday world that has to a gleeful extent caught up with Ballard's projection.

And what, twenty years on, of the *Exhibition* itself? The original collection, remember, is really two: the nine

Traven stories themselves, and an outlying cometary belt of six (now ten) satellite pieces. The second group, more overtly mischievous and unscarred by the bold narrative jump-cuts of the Traven group, have always been the better-remembered, and the more notorious – though it's sad "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" seems to be treasured more for its jolly amusing title than for the clever and prophetic fantasy that went under it. (There is an astonishing tale in the commentary about the later fate of this text.) But it's the "condensed novels" (as they were then, perhaps with a touch of unrecognized humour, described) that grow most in stature at twenty years' distance. In 1970, these were perceived as difficult, dangerous, and rather mad, a reaction that now seems both embarrassing and mildly incomprehensible. In 1990 they seem almost innocently accessible (evidence, no doubt, for the shrinking literary attention span), and what read then like obsessive and dehumanized modernism seems quite movingly compassionate and humanistic today. And the writing is simply more beautiful than anything you remember. A gorgeous rebirth.

(Nick Lowe)

A Book With an Ending Wendy Bradley

Rip the cover off your copy of *Rigana* by Guy Gavriel Kay (Penguin £7.99), write your three favourite insults across it and post it back to Penguin.

One for the cover illustration, which is clearly the result of some terrible misprint in the Penguin factory and should have been wrapped around someone's sharecropped epic, possibly with a title like "Robin of Sherwood and a Dangerous Way To Cut Your Hair." The second is for the plot description in the blurb: "in this time of oppression and darkness, something miraculously stirs. A handful of men and women, following a leader whose identity is a closely guarded secret, set in motion the dangerous quest for freedom..." One of the heroes (whose resemblance to Michael Praed is not, I have to say, heavily stressed in the plot) is the rightful prince of *Rigana*. It is hardly giving the plot away to tell you that, since you will have spotted him at the latest by Chapter 4, and he reveals himself in Chapter 5, but it meant I wasted much of Chapters 1 to 5 fuming "closely guarded secret! He's the youngest son of the prince who was sent away from the battle because he was too young!"

Penguin's third and unforgivable piece of sabotage is the blurb's claim that Kay has "crafted an epic narrative that will change for ever the boundaries of fantasy fiction." *Change for ever??!!* This is unforgivable because it makes you spend much of the book in a "Bah! Humbug!" sort of mood muttering "change for ever!" and looking churlishly for a boundary the book even attempts to cross.

So throw away the cover: the book itself, however, you should wrap lovingly in sticky-backed plastic and carry around with you until the plot gets a grip and you have to set aside the rest of the week to finish it.

I liked it for the plot, which deals with the attempt of a sorcerer-tyrant to erase the memory of the province of Tigana, its people, its art, its name even, from the minds of everyone save the few survivors of the battle in which he conquered it but in which his son was killed. There are two tyrants menacing the Palm peninsula on which Tigana stood, and the two opposing powers are using the Palm as their battleground, picking off the small provinces one by one. The resistance is subtle and cautious, not striking macho poses and making futile gestures against one tyrant or the other but biding its time and setting off one power against another until both can be brought down and freedom restored not just to Tigana but the whole Palm. The politics may be optimistic but they are certainly more thoughtful than the usual good guy/bad guy simplicity.

Also the characters are well drawn: even the two tyrants have characters, they are not black-hat cyphers. One is described so engagingly I began to sympathize with him and wish for there to be a way for him to back down and put everything right. The main heroes, the Prince and his companions, are again more thoughtfully described than usual. For example when we first meet Baerd he appears to be the standard "blonde giant" familiar from everywhere – the strong competent second lead, Little John, Willie Garvin – and then he takes off the padding and washes out the blonde and he is a person with a history and feelings and a story of his own. The women characters are cut from fairly standard patterns – fiery redhead, sweet Alais, rejecting mother, vampire sexpot, but each of them has a history which gives depth to the cutout, rounds them into real people. Dianora and Catriana, the two main women, each make symbolic and climactic leaps from high places into water (and Catriana twice, the second time without water to protect her from certain death) which both has a pleasing symmetry and is a symbol for their letting go of their old lives and trusting themselves to the new.

That one can discuss the book's symbolism at all is a sign of its depth, that it is not the usual stroll down the hero trail with a pack of card figures. The religion, too, is a pleasing synthesis of familiar elements into a "Triad" of gods in whose worship one can believe these people would engage: Kay is particularly good on the telling, offhand detail such as the single candle burned on a night fires are forbidden to remind the gods their worshippers are not slavish, the single red glove worn symbolically on a bridal night, the grapes left to ice on the vine for the prized blue wine. He even includes some sex (p63 and p326/7 but play fair: if you break the spine perv-ing, you have to buy that copy).

And, hallelujah, he can write an ending. Not "happy ever after," not "full stop. And then... the sequel," not "er, I've run out of ideas, that's about it." The plot is resolved but the characters' lives go on. The erasure of memory, the withholding of information to which people are entitled, is the key theme of the plot and it is also the point around which the ending turns. I won't say any more except that it is so perfect I don't think I could bear it if Kay wrote a sequel. (Wendy Bradley)

Poultry SF Jones & McIntosh

Back in 1987 when original sf anthologies seemed rarer – and therefore more precious – Titan published the original *Tales From the Forbidden Planet*, edited by Roz Kaveney, an uneven collection but enlivened with enough strong stories to make it a welcome arrival. Now, three years on and from the same publisher and editor, comes *More Tales From the Forbidden Planet* (Titan Books, £7.95) with the same large-format presentation, a similar mix of sf, fantasy and horror tales, each illustrated by a different artist, and the same unifying notion – all the writers collected here have had signing sessions at one or other of the Forbidden Planet shops. It's an impressive-looking package – but although you could hardly accuse the publishers of rushing to press with this second volume, the quality of the fiction suggests exactly that.

Perhaps the only surprise element in an otherwise familiar cast is the inclusion of three writers more commonly associated with comics, a potentially bright idea that here seems unfortunately to have failed in the implementation. Neil Gaiman's "Webs" – a broody fantasy strong on atmospheric but lacking any real sense of purpose – is the best of a very weak bunch. Jamie Delano's overwrought "The Horror in

Our Lives" details the on-going angst of Jeremiah, his improbably named working-class protagonist, whilst Ann Nocenti's "The Heart Beats" seems to be little more than punk posturing. Perhaps all three could be turned into comics with some imaginative graphic augmentation – but as stand-alone texts they leave a lot to be desired.

A few stories manage to just-about work, if not exactly to shine. John Sladek's "Dining Out" subsists on a wafer-thin idea – a terrorist obsessed with a fast-food chain mascot threatens a restaurant with destruction unless his idol appears – but the care that Sladek takes with detail and character keeps you reading through. Mick Farren's "Fun in the Final Days" runs on the over-familiar notion of civilization going down the tubes while waiting for a king-sized asteroid to pulp planet Earth, but again at least it's readable enough. Larry Niven in "The Portrait of Daryanree the King" returns to the fantasy world of his Magic-Goes-Away series for a story that starts promisingly with a clever twist on the Dorian Gray theme but then fizzles out not long before the end. David Langford's "Ellipses" plays intriguingly with algorithms and the afterlife but can't deliver the portentous climax the story is apparently building towards.

From here on in, it's mostly downhill. First, there are the Great-SF-About-Poultry stories: "Hollywood Chickens" by Terry Pratchett and "The Human Chicken" by Ian Watson are both about – yes – chickens. The Pratchett consists of that joke about them crossing the road pumped up into an anecdote, whilst the Watson details the birth of an oversized specimen to human parents and its eventual entry into the halls of academe: unfortunately, both stories require stuffing. The best thing to be said about Storm Constantine's "Did You Ever See Oysters Walking Up the Stairs?" is that, apart from the title, it is at least wholly comprehensible – not a claim which could be made for several of the other stories here. Beyond that, all we get is an overlong piece of fairly bland sexual intrigue with a paste-on supernatural ending to give the story some claim to the fantasy/horror tag.

Colin Greenland's "Best Friends" lopes along for most of its length with all the trappings of a conventional ghost story but then simply evaporates off the page at the end, leaving no real hint of what it was all supposed to be about. There's some insect-fixated hysteria in R. M. Lamming's "Wasp Songs," while Rachel Pollack's "The Woman Who Didn't Come Back" deals with the more substantial themes of death and sexual politics in a female-only society – but unfortunately remains more of an enigma than a story. Well ahead in the mystification-

for-the-sake-of-mystification hurdle, however, is John Clute riding "Death of a Sacred Monster" – which probably has something to do with a character called Papa Bear and his polygamous family. Leaving the reader confused and frustrated is one thing, leaving them convinced – rightly or wrongly – that this was the author's design all along is quite another.

There is however one story which is a pleasure to read: "Black Motley" by Mary Gentle, the longest story in the book. It's set in the same complex, Elizabethan-textured world as her novel, *Rats and Gargoyles* – a society where human-sized Rats lord it over human beings and, among other baroque inventions, there is a University of Crime and (integral to the perhaps somewhat flimsy plot) an Academy of Memory. The story centres on a wayward King's Memory, pursued by different factions determined to make sure he doesn't reveal their secrets to this world's Gloriana (a clever creation, the tail-tied Rat-Queen). Gentle juggles the events and the surprisingly large cast of characters with impressive fluency and skill, and on the evidence of this story her novel looks well worth attention. However, this story comes last in the book – and it's entirely possible that many readers, either frustrated or just plain bored by what has gone before, will give up long before they ever get to it. In this one instance, their loss.

Conventional publishing wisdom has it that anthologies, particularly original anthologies do not sell – and a collection as poor as this one is likely to sustain the apparent truth of that notion. Glossy and well packaged, *Forbidden Planet* may well invite many a casual browser to lift it off the shelf and, despite a cover price of almost eight pounds, perhaps even buy it. But then, having parted with their money and sampled the wares here, how many purchasers coming new to the genre will be eager to repeat the experience when the next sf/fantasy collection appears in the bookshops? This is a book that does no favours either to the sf short story – or to sf as a whole.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

Pulp Time-Twisters Ken Brown

Morning of Creation and *Soldier of Another Fortune* by Mike Shupp are Books Two and Three of "The Destiny Makers," (Headline, £3.99 and £4.50) – sequels to *With Fate Conspire*, and apparently to be continued in *The Last Reckoning*. These two volumes are an improvement on

the dull first part – in which Tim Harper was captured by a time machine and transplanted 90,000 years into the future, where he became part of a secret project to secure the independence of the city of Alghera by changing history, using time machines based on the one he came in.

Morning of Creation concerns the unfortunately named Kyleene, a young barbarian woman rescued from wolves in 5000 AD, and is mostly set in an isolated house occupied by only her and Harper, where he is training her as an agent for the project. This is a welcome change of pace from the violence, time paradoxes and general confusion of the previous volume. We still have fallout from battles that were never fought, memories of people who were never born and characters known to be dead turning up in their time machines, but the war is mostly off-stage.

We are back in the mix again with *Soldier of Another Fortune* – which follows one of the conquerors of Alghera, who finds the only time machine that wasn't taken into the past (which, of course, he later places there himself) and sets off into history in pursuit of the Project, hoping to destroy all the time travellers along with their machines. In order to assassinate Harper he returns to a time period in which his target is a mercenary officer in an army fighting against Alghera, and joins his unit. Harper himself is also meddling in history, trying to assassinate the king of Alghera to get back to an alternate history in which a previous girlfriend exists.

It's a pleasant surprise to find the successive parts of what is essentially a pulp fantasy series written with such distinctly different structures. However, they remain overlong, flat and repetitive.

John Brunner's *Children of the Thunder* (Futura/Orbit, £3.99) is set in a near-fascist late-90s Britain, as is almost all the British sf I read these days. It's another version of the old sf chestnut about children with strange mental powers. A journalist and a scientist are trying to track them down, by chasing up databases and old medical and police computer records. Meanwhile the children are finding out about each other and becoming organized, and the rest of the world is deteriorating fast. By the (very downbeat) end a plausible scientific explanation is dredged up. It's all professionally done but the novel never takes flight. This is competent rather than brilliant Brunner: he's done much better in the past.

Soma by Charles Platt (Grafton, £3.50) is set in "Piers Anthony's Worlds of Chthon" and must be one of those attempts to get "fairly rich, fairly quick" that Charles described in a

recent *Interzone*. Just as in its immediate predecessor, *Plasm*, women are abused and mutilated for sexual pleasure. The protagonist is put through extreme mental and physical cruelty which eventually turns him into a mass-murderer. The cover (showing him cutting a woman's head off after raping her, his erection hidden by a large, bloody sword) gives fair warning of the unpleasant contents.

I turn in relief to *Brothers in Arms* by Lois McMaster Bujold (Headline, £4.50). This continues the story of Miles Naismith, who lives a double life as Admiral of the Dendarii Mercenaries and Lord Vorkosigan of Barayara. In this extended episode he travels to Earth, gets involved in an old political scandal and makes stupid remarks about clones that rebound upon him. Jolly good fun is had by all, and it's the only space opera I've ever read which ends up on the Thames Barrier.

Which brings us to *Invasion* by Derek Slade (Oriflamme, £4.50), another contribution to both the "England Invaded" school of fiction (one of sf's major roots) and "What if Hitler Won the War?" (one of it's more fruitful branches).

Well, what if? For Derek Slade, the result is not much different from what would have happened if he had lost. His Britain is intact, and still pretty Imperial; France is dismembered into Vichy, Burgundy and a small DMZ in Picardy (not too different from what happened to Germany after the real world wars); Czechoslovakia and Poland disappear entirely, and the Top Nations of the last half of the century are still going to be the USA and USSR whatever the Nazis think. Pity about the Jews of course.

Invasion follows the experiences of two young men, one British teenager in the Home Guard, one German infantryman, alternating with chapters of narrative history. Briefly, Hitler doesn't order the Luftwaffe to bomb cities in 1940, they concentrate on RAF bases (particularly radar stations and sector command stations – both more or less ignored in the real war), drive the RAF north of the Thames and clear a path for the invasion. When it comes the Royal Navy flattens most of it at first, but the capital ships are put out of action by a combination of British incompetence and German airpower. The outnumbered Germans manage, just, to beat the British on land due to luck and Rommel; there is an Armistice at 11 am on 11/11/40 (of course) followed by a humiliating peace at Nurnberg. There's also a sub-plot about the Duke of Windsor, and a twist at the end.

And that's about it – pretty standard stuff as these books go, neither the style nor the content at all innovative. The

language is very much that of a rather old fashioned historian, the dialogue is wooden, the characters poorly realized. Yet I read all 496 pages in one day, enjoyed it and felt slightly guilty for enjoying it. I enjoyed it because there is a certain train-spotterish fascination in military maps and orders of battle and discussions of tanks, battleships and fighter planes. I found myself refighting the war in my head. "Would Stukas really have been that effective against battleships?" "Would the British ever have been so stupid as to leave *Revenge* and *Repulse* in Portsmouth overnight with the Germans at Shoreham?" "Did the Germans have enough bomber capacity to cause a firestorm?"

I felt guilty because that interest in hardware and maps places a barrier between the reader and thoughts about the causes, effects or morality of war. At the time this review is being written our newspapers have been stuffed with accounts of the weaponry being sent to Saudi Arabia for months. I must have read three separate descriptions of the J233 cluster bomb, or whatever it's called. And I was fascinated, and felt guilty for it. Assuming that others reacted in the same way, there must have been millions of people in Europe and North America thinking of the possible war in Iraq as a purely technical problem. We were being collectively desensitized to the idea of war. As if it was somehow all right to kill your neighbour just because you had a shiny new weapon begging to be used, as if the weapons themselves made war inevitable, as some kind of final field test.

To be fair to *Invasion*, the author doesn't seem to be a mass murderer or a Nazi on the evidence of this book, even if he does have a few odd ideas about kings. He does pose, if rather indirectly, the central moral problem of war – which is that the fighters do things that would normally be considered wrong, just because they are ordered to. As you would expect (there are few plot surprises) the two central characters of *Invasion* meet each other after they have been detached from their units and, recognizing their common humanity, do not fight.

In passing, there is, to English people, something compelling about the "England Invaded" plot. Something alien, something science-fictional. H. G. Wells knew what he was doing in *The War of the Worlds*. *Invasion* has the German killing a man on the street I first lived on when I got married, the English soldier hiding under a railway bridge I used to cross every day to get to work, the decisive battle being fought between Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill station, tanks trundling past the *Interzone* bunker in Brighton. To us these accounts are fantastical; we genuinely do not think of

Surrey or Sussex as a location for war; however many books we read about it, it always seems unnatural to us. It really doesn't happen here. Wars happen in France, or Arabia, don't they?

A quick one to end up with: **Tracer** by Stuart Jackson (Sphere, £3.50) is set in a near-future Britain (1999 and under right-wing oppressive government, surprise, surprise) in which well-meaning NHS employee Nick Gorman is working for the Special Health Authority, which exists to hunt down people with HIV. His boss puts him on the case of a gay man who turns out to be having an affair with a cabinet minister – who promptly dies, and things go downhill from there. I couldn't quite come to grips with the hero's mysterious excellence at killing people (most NHS bureaucrats I know are wimps like me) or the happy ending. Perhaps it suffers in comparison with the wonderful *V for Vendetta*, the comic book by Alan Moore and Dave Lloyd which I reread at about the same time, which goes over much the same territory and at least has the guts to end in 1998, and is the only book I read last month that I can actually recommend you go out and buy. (Ken Brown)

Tenured Criticism

Science Fiction Roots and Branches Edited by Rhys Garnett and R.J. Ellis (Macmillan, £35.00, hc; £12.99, pb) is a title in the *Insights* series, whose declared purpose is to bring "to academics, students and general readers the very best contemporary criticism on neglected literary and cultural areas." Oddly enough, the present volume concentrates almost exclusively on exactly those aspects of science fiction which have not been neglected: its Victorian origins, recent feminist sf, and such academically "in" writers as Stanislaw Lem and Ursula Le Guin.

Many of the essays employ the rather turgid Marxist methods of analysis which have been fashionable in academic circles for the last twenty years; it will be interesting to see whether these methods will wither away with the Marxist states which have suddenly come to see themselves as neglected cultural areas, but students anxious for the long-term respectability of the book should not be put off on that score – academic tenure will probably prove to be less fragile than political tenure, and old dons never learn new tricks. The main exception to the abovementioned generalizations, and the best essay in the book, is Patrick Parrinder's shrewd and well-written analysis of the changing role of the scientist in sf.

(Brian Stableford)

Comedy and Kid's Stuff Paul Brazier

Writing comedy or writing for children, like writing sf, is more difficult than other forms of authorship. To be interesting, any piece of writing must tell us new things related to what we already know. If there is nothing new it is the dulllest thing we ever saw, while writing which has nothing familiar is usually incomprehensible. Writing for children cannot assume its audience has an adult understanding of the world, so the new things it introduces are often aimed at increasing that understanding. Similarly, science fiction, because it takes as its setting the entire infinity of time and space, cannot assume its audience's familiarity with any particular setting. But, with sf, while the something new often appears to be the alien setting/civilization/attitudes depicted, the real new something is revealed when we realize that we can relate to this alien-ness, that that alien thing is very like this familiar thing, and that thus it already does pre-exist in our world. The new thing is thus often only there between the lines. Indeed, it is the realization that lurks in the gaps between the story and our knowledge: the realization that there is no gap. In comedy, likewise, the absurd juxtaposition of ideas leads to laughter, but in good comedy, we laugh even as a truth is revealed. Trying to manage more than one of these difficult areas at the same time can lead to disastrous results. And bad comedy does not reveal truth. It traps it where it already was, inaccessible to us.

Douglas Hill's **The Colloghi Conspiracy** (Gollancz, £12.95) is one such unfortunate mixture. It is advertised as his second science-fiction novel for adults (the first was *The Fraxilly Fracas*). This is presumably to distinguish it from his sf for children. But it is adult in the way adolescent schoolboys' humour generally is. We already know about the various paraphernalia of sf here, like spaceships and aliens, and aspects of human life now, like greed, vanity, lust, and jealousy. I would expect to find something new embedded in the plot, where an astronaut from our time, who displays other aspects of human life now – personal loyalty, charity, and kindness – is revived. Different participants in the plot try to exploit his naivety. But the book ends with an entire world having been liberated simply by the catalytic presence of the central character, Del Curb, and his being much richer but trying to figure ways of making more money still out of the situation. It seems we are being told that going out

into the wild blue yonder will accentuate the baser aspects of humanity, while higher values will be abandoned as worthless.

Now as this is all done in the spirit of high farce, it is difficult to tell whether Hill is indulging in irony or not (and I beg his forgiveness if I have misunderstood him). Certainly we are not asked to approve of Del Curb, with his outlandish clothes and selfishness. But the ancient astronaut is equally a figure of fun, as are any representatives of higher values who appear. And the attitudes to sex are equally adolescent. Del Curb fancies most of the women he encounters, but gets nowhere with any of them (sorry, but there isn't an inoffensive way of expressing that). Then, with the aid of an aphrodisiac called *jwrl*, he has an extended sexual encounter with a furry alien. He puts the pleasure derived down to his prowess only being accentuated by the drug, and ends up seeking to make money from the drug. He seems completely unaware of, or to deliberately ignore, the emotion displayed towards him by the alien. My discomfort with all this comes not from the display of those adolescent attitudes, but rather from the absence of any real alternative to them. If you don't know already that these attitudes are adolescent, there is nothing here to tell you so, and all you can do is identify with them, and thus have them reinforced. This is a good example of how comedy can tie truth up in a sack and hide it away from us. It made me want to avoid the children's books.

Some people might say that it is just harmless fun. Harmless fun, as in bear-baiting, fox-hunting, or professional boxing, say I. To see the depths of depravity good comedy can reveal, we can turn to **Unnatural Selection** (Black Swan, £4.99) by Daniel Evan Weiss. Here, a New York cockroach indulges in various ploys to try to manipulate the humans in the apartment where it lives in order to control its environment. Sounds like a very human endeavour to me. That I didn't find this book very interesting I have since discovered is because I have never encountered a New York cockroach. I understand that this book was rejected by American publishers because it was too shockingly controversial – and certainly, when a cockroach compares the vaginas of two women of different races to find out why the man it is trying to manipulate is only attracted to the wrong one, the story is travelling perilously close to the bounds of acceptability. None of New York's indigenous racial stereotypes are depicted favourably (not even the different kinds of cockroach), so all of them could be equally offended by it (much in the way that *Satanic Verses* depicts everyone

offensively: that only Moslems took offence is a source of constant wonder to me). People make mistakes, love, hate and die in this book. Things change because of what is done by the characters. Whether it is right or wrong is immaterial: what is important is that the characters affect other lives than their own, and in turn are affected. The humour is very black, and I didn't enjoy it at all. But, for all that I didn't like it, I have to say this is a good book in a way that Douglas Hill's isn't.

Writing for young adults, or for children, bears a similar weight of responsibility. The author has to be responsible in precisely the way any adult in charge of children must be. The stories in Diana Wynne Jones' anthology **Hidden Turnings** (Mandarin, £2.99) all succeed in this area, in varying amounts. From the likes of Kilworth, Tuttle, Zelazny, Pratchett and Jones herself, they all tread a delicate border line between fantasy and horror and deal with how individuals are in some way responsible for their fate. While all the stories are good, high spots for me for their settings as well as their particular human warmth were the stories by Emma Bull ("A Bird that Whistles") and Robert Westall ("Fifty, Fatty"). But I was surprised to realize that the lead-off tale is by none other than Douglas Hill. "True Believer" depicts how we are responsible for the consequences of what we believe. Simple and responsible, it changed my mind and made me want to seek out his children's books, if only to find out if the so-called adult books are an aberration.

While believing that children's books have to be equally responsibly produced, being married to someone who happily read *War and Peace* when she was twelve warns me not to underestimate how much kids can grasp. In **The Skybreaker** (Orchard, £8.95), third of her "Inland" novels, Gwyneth Jones, writing as Ann Halam, has produced an equally moral tale which is nevertheless easily approached by readers of all ages. Zanne, heroine of all three books, had an instructive rite of passage into adulthood in the first novel, *Daymaker*. She is now grown and, while still learning all the time herself, now oversees the growth of other characters. In the second book, *Transformations*, this was a lad called Hoyle, who has come into this third book as her partner. Now he helps her with a new protégé, a young king called Temias. Zanne's particular ability in her fantastic science-fictional world is to empathize with the machines of a bygone age, and to extinguish them at last, because they threaten the consensual reality of her world. In the first novel, this was precisely what she achieved. In the second, the threat was transformed into something more tenuous and

altogether more grim, and now in the third it has moved forwards so that it is in the form of new attempts to build machinery. In some ways this is less satisfying as a single novel, because the sense of place is rather lop-sided. But read as the final book of a trilogy, this feeling disappears, and it gives a satisfying closure to the circle of events which began in *The Daymaker*. Of course, it now begs comparison with Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy (or tetralogy). But that would be invidious. The reputation of these books will far better grow on their own virtues, and I confidently look forward to giving, each for its own merits, both sets of books to my children to read.

(Paul Brazier)

UK Books Received September 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Adams, Douglas, and Mark Carwardine. **Last Chance to See...** Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-00924-5, 208pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Travel book by the well-known humorous sf writer and his zoologist friend; first edition.) 22nd October.

Aickman, Robert. **The Unsettled Dust**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0173-2, 302pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror collection, first edition; consists of eight stories selected from the author's volumes *The Wine-Dark Sea* [itself a compilation from earlier books] and *Sub Rosa*.) 4th October.

Aiken, Joan. **A Fit of Shivers**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04803-4, 140pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile horror/fantasy collection, first edition.) Late entry: 30th August publication, received in September.

Anthony, Piers. **Unicorn Point**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-42934-2, 303pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; umpteenth in the "Phaze/Proton" or "Apprentice Adept" series; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 4th October.

Asimov, Isaac. **Azazel**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40068-1, 221pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 35.) 26th October.

Asimov, Isaac. **Robot Visions**. Illustrated by Ralph McQuarrie. "A Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. Book." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04841-7, 383pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1990; contains 30-odd stories and essays on the robot theme; inevitably, most of the pieces are familiar from other books; however, the title story is new, and two others have not been collected before.) 20th September.

Ballard, J. G. **War Fever**. Collins, ISBN 0-00-223770-9, 176pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf collection, first edition; contains 14 stories, in the following order: "War Fever," "The Secret History of World War 3," "Dream

Cargoes," "The Object of the Attack," "Love in a Colder Climate," "The Largest Theme Park in the World," "Answers to a Questionnaire," "The Air Disaster," "Report on an Unidentified Space Station," "The Man Who Walked on the Moon," "The Enormous Space," "Memories of the Space Age," "Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown" and "The Index"; none of these pieces has appeared previously in a UK Ballard collection, though several of them have been collected in American volumes published by Arkham House and Re/Search; four of the stories were first published in *Interzone*, which makes us top dog [three appeared in *Bananas*, two in *Ambit*, one apiece in *The Guardian*, *City Limits*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *The Observer*, and one, "Dream Cargoes," has not appeared previously in the English language.] 5th November.

Barnard, Keith. **Embryo**. Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-62993-X, 299pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf/horror novel, first edition; reviewed by Mark Morris in *Interzone* 41.) 20th September.

Barrett, David V., ed. **Digital Dreams**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53150-3, 347pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf anthology, first edition; contains original stories about computers by Storm Constantine, Garry Kilworth, David Langford, Ian McDonald, Terry Pratchett, Keith Roberts, Josephine Saxton, Alex Stewart, Diana Wynne Jones and others.) 4th October.

Blaylock, James P. **The Stone Giant**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20174-2, 331pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *The Elfin Ship* and *The Disappearing Dwarf*.) 27th September.

Bova, Ben. **Voyagers III: Star Brothers**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-63030-7, 341pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 27th September.

Bowkett, Stephen. **Frontiersville High**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04755-0, 139pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile sf collection, first edition; contains four linked stories set in a "high school in space"). Late entry: 30th August publication, received in September.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Incarnate**. Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4395-6, 490pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1983; this edition is revised and expanded.) 13th September.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Midnight Sun**. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-18650-4, 312pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first edition; reviewed, from an advance proof copy, by Mark Morris in *Interzone* 41.) 13th September.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Obsession**. Macdonald/Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4395-4, 283pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1985; this edition contains a new three-page afterword.) 13th September.

Card, Orson Scott. **Characters and Viewpoint**. "Writer's Workshop." Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-073-4, 182pp, paperback, £5.99. (Writers' manual, first published in the USA, 1988; Card is of course a well known sf novelist.) 6th September.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Wind from the Sun: Stories of the Space Age**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04842-5, 193pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1972.) 27th September.

Cole, Adrian. **Labyrinth of Worlds: Star Requiem 4**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440690-8, 341pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition.) 25th October.

Corman, Roger, with Jim Jerome. **How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime**. Muller, ISBN 0-09-

174679-5, 237pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Memoirs of a leading film producer/director, first published in the USA [?], 1990; most of his hundred or more films have been sf or horror, and he has also been responsible for nurturing the talents of many other film-makers, among them producer Gale Anne Hurd and director James Cameron, who made *The Terminator*, *Aliens* and *The Abyss*; most recently, Corman himself has directed *Frankenstein Unbound*, based on the Brian Aldiss novel.) 25th October.

Cowper, Richard. **The Twilight of Briareus**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04693-7, 255pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1974; "Richard Cowper" is a pseudonym for John Middleton Murry, who has also written as "Colin Murry" and "Colin Middleton Murry"). 27th September.

Dalton, Annie. **The Afterdark Princess**. Illustrated by Kate Aldous. Methuen, ISBN 0-416-15902-8, 115pp, hardcover, £7.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition.) 17th September.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. **Blood is Not Enough: 17 Stories of Vampirism**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20852-6, 414pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; contains a mixture of new and reprinted pieces from such authors as Pat Cadigan, Harlan Ellison, Joe Haldeman, Garry Kilworth, Tanith Lee, Fritz Leiber, Dan Simmons and Steve Rasnic Tem.) 13th September.

Dibell, Ansen. **Plot**. "Writer's Workshop." Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-069-6, 170pp, paperback, £5.99. (Writers' manual, first published in the USA, 1988; "Ansen Dibell" is a pseudonym regularly used by a female American sf novelist.) 6th September.

Donaldson, Stephen. **The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story**. Collins, ISBN 0-00-223827-6, 173pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; it's described as "the first novel in an epic new science-fiction adventure"). 22nd November.

Dorsey, Candace Jane. **Machine Sex and Other Stories**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4242-1, 164pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf collection, first published in Canada, 1988.) 11th October.

Grant, Charles L., ed. **Night Terrors: All Original Stories by David Morrell, Joseph Payne Brennan, Karl Edward Wagner**. Illustrated by Robert W. Lavoie. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3440-X, 308pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA as *Night Visions* 2, 1985; it has since reappeared in America as *Night Visions: Dead Image*, 1987.) 11th October.

Grimwood, Ken. **Replay**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07462-7, 366pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel on a "timeslip" theme; first published in the USA, 1986; winner of the World Fantasy Award; this appears to be a reissue of the 1988 Grafton printing, which we didn't receive at the time.) 25th October.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Weird Tales: A selection, in facsimile, of the best from the world's most famous fantasy magazine**. Xanadu, ISBN 1-85480-050-7, 264pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in 1976; contains stories by Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, August Derleth, Edmond Hamilton, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, Seabury Quinn, Clark Ashton Smith, Theodore Sturgeon and all the authors one might expect; this is described as a "revised edition," though the revisions are not readily apparent.) 18th October.

Hardy, David A. **Visions of Space: Artists Journey Through the Cosmos**. Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-136-X, 176pp, trade paperback, £10.95. (Art compilation, first published in 1989.) 11th October.

Hicken, Mandy, and Ray Prytherch. **Now Read On: A Guide to Contemporary Popular Fiction**. Gower, ISBN 0-566-03639-8, 328pp, hardcover, £25. (Bibliographical guide to genre fiction, first edition; the categories which it covers include "Adventure stories; Contemporary glamour; Country life; Detective stories; Family stories; Fantasies; Foreign locations; Gothic romances; Historical novels; Humorous novels; Macabre stories; 'Perceptive' women's novels; Police work; The saga; Science fiction; Sea stories; Spy stories; Thrillers; and War stories"; unfortunately, the coverage of sf is rather poor [no entries for Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and other notable authors still very much alive and writing, and the entries which do exist, from Greg Bear to Kate Wilhelm, are riddled with bibliographical errors].) 11th October.

Hill, Reginald. **One Small Step: A Dalziel and Pascoe Novella**. Collins Crime Club, ISBN 0-00-232292-7, 109pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Detective story set on the Moon in the year 2010; first edition; Hill is a well-known crime novelist whose star has risen in recent years; what not many people know is that he wrote two sf novels a couple of decades ago under the pseudonym of "Dick Morland" [*Heart Clock* and *Albion! Albion!*].) 3rd September.

Hinz, Christopher. **Ash Ock: The Paratwa Saga - Book 2**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0382-4, 308pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 6th September.

Ingpen, Robert, and Philip Wilkinson. **Encyclopedia of Mysterious Places: The Life and Legends of Ancient Sites Around the World**. Dragon's World, ISBN 1-85028-090-8, 256pp, hardcover, £18.95. (Large-format, heavily illustrated study of such archaeological sites as Mycenae, Troy, Babylon and Great Zimbabwe; first edition; text by Wilkinson and pictures by the award-winning Ingpen; it's a coffee-table work, but intelligently and attractively produced; recommended as a gift for younger readers.) 20th September.

Jefferies, Mike. **Hall of Whispers: Book Two of The Heirs to Gnarlismyre**. Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617894-4, 414pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th October.

[Jones, Stephen, ed.] **Fantasy Tales**. [No. 5, Autumn 1990.] Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-054-8, 202pp, paperback, £2.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; it's really a twice-yearly magazine in book format, but since it carries an ISBN instead of an ISSN we list it here instead of under "Magazines Received"; this issue, which is twice the length of previous ones, contains new stories by Garry Kilworth, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, David J. Schow, J. N. Williamson, etc.) 4th October.

Jones, Stephen, and Ramsey Campbell, eds. **Best New Horror**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-058-0, 390pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; this is the premier volume in a new annual series which will reprint the best horror stories of the preceding year; this volume has contributions from Stephen Gallagher, Thomas Ligotti, Nicholas Royle, Karl Edward Wagner, Cherry Wilder and others, as well as two stories, by Kim Newman and Ian Watson, reprinted from *Interzone*.) 1st November.

Kilworth, Garry. **Dark Hills, Hollow Clocks: Stories from the Otherworld**.

Methuen, ISBN 0-416-15632-0, 112pp, £8.95. (Juvenile fantasy collection, first edition.) *Late entry*: 6th August publication, received in September.

King, Stephen. **The Dark Half**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52468-X, 468pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Chris Hampshire in *Interzone* 34.) 4th October.

Le Guin, Ursula. **Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04870-0, 219pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 4th October.

Leroux, Gaston. **The Phantom of the Opera**. Translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos. Introduction and other matter by Penelope Woolf. Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-70-7, 385pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in France, 1910; the translation is the first English one, of 1911.) 28th September.

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Renegades of Pern**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02122-3, 384pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 38.) 25th October.

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Rowan**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02338-2, 335pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 15th November.

McCammon, Robert R. **The Wolf's Hour**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20585-3, 720pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 35.) 25th October.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Fortress of the Pearl: An Elric Tale**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20884-4, 269pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1989; sequel, or rather prequel, to *Stormbringer* et al.) 27th September.

Morris, Mark. **Toady**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13632-8, 702pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 34.) 26th October.

Murphy, Roberta. **The Enchanted**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0482-0, 230pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1989.) 4th October.

Naha, Ed. **RoboCop 2**. Based on a screenplay by Frank Miller and Walon Green. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014341-6, 234pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novelization, first published in the USA, 1990.) 12th October.

Palmer, Jane. **Moving Moosevan: A sequel to The Planet Dweller**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4241-3, 150pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 11th October.

Park, Paul. **Sugar Rain: The Starbridge Chronicles**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20889-5, 384pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Soldiers of Paradise*.) 13th September.

Pohl, Frederik. **Homegoing**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04895-6, 279pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 27th September.

Pratchett, Terry. **Truckers**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-52595-2, 207pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1989; the opening volume in the trilogy about the "Nomes" – since followed in hardcover by *Diggers and Wings*.) 21st September.

Rodgers, Alan. **Blood of the Children**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40247-1, 299pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 21st September.

Shaw, Bob. **Orbitsville Judgement**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04551-5, 282pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Orbitsville* and *Orbitsville Departure*.) 20th September.

Shea, Michael. **Polyphemus**. Foreword by Algis Budrys. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20848-8, 288pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy/horror collection, first published in the USA, 1987; the back-cover blurb is a masterpiece of over-sell: "Never in the entire history of horror writing...compellingly presented...this superlative collection...vivid and unique...one of the great gut-wrenching experiences...a contemporary classic...supreme mastery...an amazing tour de force...some of the finest, most chilling speculative fiction of today"; well, actually, Shea is pretty good, and remains somewhat underrated by sf and fantasy fans in general.) 27th September.

Shirley, John. **Heatseeker**. Foreword by Stephen P. Brown. Introduction by William Gibson. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20837-2, 364pp, paperback, £ 3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1988; two of the 19 stories, "What Cindy Saw" and "The Unfolding," first appeared in *Interzone*; reviewed by John Clute in *IZ* 30.) 27th September.

Stewart, Michael. **Birthright**. Collins, ISBN 0-00-223386-X, 320pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; it's the story of a feral boy who is perhaps a Neanderthal relict; the author is known for his thrillers.) *Late entry*: August publication, received in September.

Sutton, David, and Stephen Jones, eds. **Dark Voices 2: The Pan Book of Horror**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31373-8, 223pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains stories by John Brunner, Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, William F. Nolan, Brian Stableford, Cherry Wilder and others; most are new, three are reprints; reviewed by Mark Morris in *Interzone* 41.) 12th October.

Taylor, Bernard. **The Kindness of Strangers**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20684-1, 313pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA [?], 1985; the author is British, and his other books include the recently reprinted *Sweetheart*, *Sweetheart*, which Charles L. Grant described as "the best ghost story I have ever read.") 13th September.

Taylor, Keith. **Ravens' Gathering: Bard IV**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3458-2, 235pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 11th October.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Gate to Women's Country**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13419-8, 363pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 30.) 26th October.

Tilley, Patrick. **The Amtrak Wars Book 6: Earth-Thunder**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0002-4, 484pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first edition; an accompanying note from the publishers informs us that this bestselling series has now been "brought to a close.") 1st November.

Vance, Jack. **Showboat World**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04393-8, 171pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1975; sequel to *Big Planet*.) 27th September.

Williams, Tad. **The Dragonbone Chair: Book One of Memory, Sorrow and Thorn**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-970490-0, 930pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 18th October.

Williamson, Jack. **Mazeway**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0481-2, 290pp, paperback,

£3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it's the latest by an author whose career seems to go on and on forever: born 1908, he published his first sf story in *Amazing* in 1928.) 4th October.

Overseas Books Received

Blumlein, Michael. **The Brains of Rats**. Illustrations by T. M. Caldwell. Introduction by Michael McDowell. Scream/Press [PO Box 481146, Los Angeles, CA 90048, USA], ISBN 0-910489-28-9, 197pp, hardcover, \$25. (Sf collection, first edition [though we believe a limited, "pre-publication" edition was distributed at an American sf convention approximately a year ago]; proof copy received; contains nine stories, the first two of which, "Tissue Ablation..." and "The Brains of Rats," originally appeared in *Interzone* in 1984 and 1986; this is the work of a very unusual writer; highly recommended.) 25th October.

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. **The Others: A Science Fiction Novel**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-05140-9, 370pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; the author has previously written "Star Trek" books, but this one appears to be a more serious and original work.) 23rd October.

Boston, Bruce. **Hypertales & Metafiction**. Illustrated by T. Winter-Damon. "Drum Booklet #34." Chris Drumm [PO Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA], ISBN 0-936055-45-6, 64pp, \$4. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; contains five stories or prose poems, with an introduction entitled "Length, Breath & Plot"). *Late entry*: July publication, received in September.

Dowling, Terry. **Rynosseros**. Aphelion Publications [PO Box 619, North Adelaide, S.A. 5006, Australia], ISBN 1-875346-01-5, 228pp, paperback, \$12.95 [Australian]. (Sf collection, first edition; contains eight stories, of which five appear to be previously unpublished.) *Late entry*: publication date uncertain (summer 1990?), received in September.

Jordan, Robert. **The Great Hunt**. "Book Two of The Wheel of Time." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85140-5, 597pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 1st December.

Leiber, Fritz. **You're All Alone**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-679-1, 191pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1972; contains three stories: the title piece [which has also appeared in expanded form as the novel *The Sinful Ones*], "Four Ghosts in Hamlet" and "The Creature from the Cleveland Depths"). 24th October.

Turner, George. **A Pursuit of Miracles**. Introduction by Michael J. Tolley. Aphelion Publications [PO Box 619, North Adelaide, S.A. 5006, Australia], ISBN 1-875346-00-7, 209pp, paperback, \$12.95 [Australian]. (Sf collection, first edition; contains eight stories, most of which have appeared previously in various Australian anthologies.) *Late entry*: publication date uncertain (summer 1990?), received in September.

Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn. **Out of the House of Life: An Historical Horror Novel**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-93126-3, 446pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; latest in the author's long-running series about the vampire "Comte de Saint-Germain.") 1st December.

Sorry – "Magazines Received" has been dropped because of lack of space. **DP**

Interaction

Continued from page 5

Daemon from the Axhsgwir Plane is trying to bargain your soul for the possession of the sword Goblinslayer.

Tony R. Johnston
Redditch, Worcs.

Dear Editors:

Thank you for IZ 38. The content is very interesting. A special issue of Brian Aldiss! How wonderful it is!

I'm a fan of Brian Aldiss. I'm looking forward to his new novel, *Dracula Unbound*.

By the way, Japanese sf fans are very interested in British sf. Popular British sf writers are:

B. Aldiss (of course!).

J.G. Ballard: he is the most estimated British sf author. Eighteen books were translated.

Barrington J. Bayley: his novel *Collission with Chronos* won "Seun-sho," Japanese Nebula prize, this year!

K. Roberts: alas, his only translated novel "Pavane" is not available now.

J.P. Hogan: very popular among sf fans. Eight books are translated and all of them are available.

I. Watson: lots of Japanese sf fans regard him and Bayley as the most noticeable sf writers in the world. Three novels are translated (including a collaboration with M. Bishop).

M. Moorcock: he is known as an author of "sword and sorcery." Most of his heroic fantasies (including "Elric" series) are translated and became long-time sellers.

R. Holdstock: he is known as horror novelist Robert Faulcon (his "Night Hunter" series is popular among horror fans).

Last year, British sf anthology *Other Edens* (ed. by R. Holdstock and C. Evans) was translated. But regrettably it could not attract the interest of many people.

Recently, short stories of Geoff Ryman ("Unconquered Country") and Richard Calder ("Mosquito") were translated and published in maga-

zines. Japanese sf fans expect much of these new talents. And IZ is highly estimated in Japan.

Kudo Tatsuhiro
Tokyo

Dear Editors:

With all due respect to Messers Newman, Gaiman & Byrne and their generally illuminating piece in IZ 40 ("Culprits"), I feel obliged to correct a number of inaccuracies in their account of the current pursuits of some of the main characters from Tintin.

1. M. Tintin's writing a column for *Le Monde* is as fanciful as Paul Johnson's doing the same for the *Grauniad*. M. Tintin's pieces appear, of course, in *Le Figaro*, and they are "respected" only by those to the right of Charles Maurras.

2. M. Tintin certainly does resent *les Rosbifs*, but the authors seem to suggest that it is part of his racial inheritance. On the contrary, it resulted from a most unfortunate experience. Immediately after M. Tintin brought the Black Isle criminals to justice, Her Majesty's Customs discovered that Milou had been brought into Britain without being quarantined, and so they had the dog summarily put down. (It is worth adding, however, that M. Tintin still keeps a very soft spot in his heart for Unity Mitford.)

3. The "Thompson Twins," as your authors call them, are not in the recording business: they are making a tidy profit providing security for British army bases.

I hope that your readership will find this information helpful. Yours faithfully,

(Dr.) Timothy W. Bartel
Oxford

Dear Editors:

Mea culpa! Re: "Culprits, or Where Are They Now?" (IZ 40). Joni Mitchell is, of course, not dead. Janis Joplin is, and that was who we meant. Honest. Cringing apologies for any inconvenience caused to Miss Mitchell and her career by all those IZ readers who didn't go to see her recent exhibition on the

assumption that dead people, like Janis Joplin, couldn't paint very well. Also, Joni, sorry.

The humiliating shame of this error has driven Neil Gaiman into exile, forced Eugene Byrne to drink and prodded Kim Newman into a brief, ill-advised marriage to Cathy Gale. The secret agent, not the editor.

Incidentally, since the publication of the piece, further information has reached us. Mrs Samantha Stevens was burned at the stake by the citizens of Eastwick, New Hampshire, in 1979. The Kids From Fame became the Fading Folks From Obscurity. The Man With No Name shot it out with A Boy Named Sue. And after Sherlock Holmes retired to Sussex to keep bees in 1903, Professor Moriarty retired to Essex to keep wasps in 1904.

Peace and Love,

Kim Newman
London

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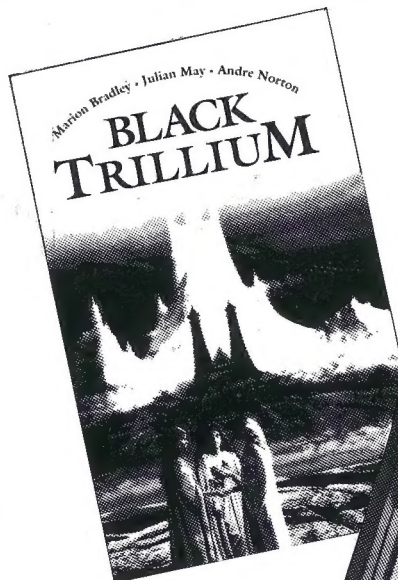
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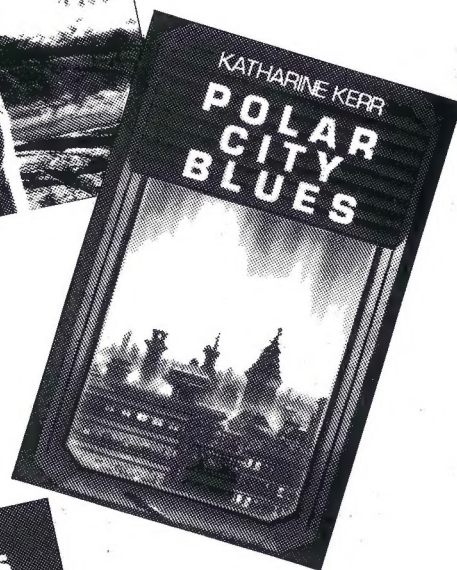
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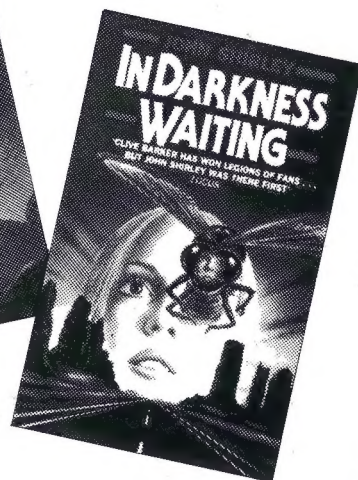


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